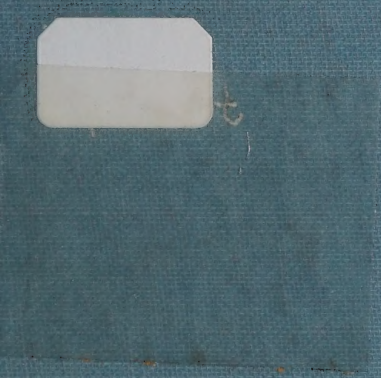
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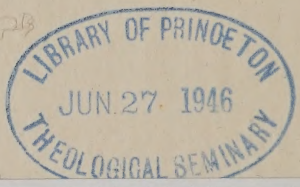

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Willard L. Sperry
Dean of the Harvard Divinity School

BEING A SERIES OF MEDITATIONS
FOR THE LENTEN SEASON

HARPER & BROTHERS
New York and London

THOSE OF THE WAY

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THIRD EDITION

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THOSE OF THE WAY

CHAPTER I

THE FIRST CHRISTIANS

ST. JOHN'S GOSPEL ENDS WITH THE WORDS, "AND there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written" (*John 21:25*). It is as though the evangelist foresaw prophetically the tide of books about Jesus which, down the centuries to come, were to flood the world.

Some eighteen hundred years after the Gospels were written, we find George Matheson, the blind hymn writer, saying:

> Son of Man, whenever I doubt of life, I think of Thee. Nothing is so impossible as that Thou shouldest be dead. I can imagine the hills to dissolve in vapor and the stars to melt in smoke, and the rivers to empty themselves in sheer exhaustion: but I feel no limit in Thee. Thou never growest old to me. Last century is old, last year is an obsolete fashion, but Thou art not obsolete. Thou art abreast of all the centuries. I have never come up with Thee, modern as I am.

It is not enough to describe Jesus as the author of our faith; he moves with the generations always ahead of us as the finisher of our faith, our religious goal even more than our historical point of departure.

Meanwhile the Four Gospels remain not only the source for all books written about Jesus but the touchstone on which they must be tested. Christian devotion, expressed in Christian art, has never hesitated to portray Jesus as a contemporary, picturing him in the terms of its own time and clothing him in its own dress. In the fourteenth century William Langland, the author of *Piers Plowman*, said of Christ:

I have seen him in silk
In grey and in fur
I have seen him singing
But in rich robes
With cap and oiled hair
And cleanly clothed
In a Friar's frock
In Saint Francis' time.

I have seen him in russet,
and in gilt armour,
in ragged weeds,
often he walketh
and his crown shaven,
in black and Tartar silk.
once was he found

When pious fancy departs too far from fact, it must be corrected by reference back to the original. If the Jesus of theology, or of books of devotion, or of art is no longer recognizable for the person he originally was and should always remain, then our Christianity must go back patiently and humbly to its biblical sources and begin again.

The New Testament, which is the first and greatest of all our Christian classics, makes almost no use of the word "Christian." It occurs only three times: once in *Acts 26:28*, where Agrippa says to Paul, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian"; once in *I Peter 4:16*, in which the writer says, "Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed"; and once most con-

spicuously in the familiar statement of *Acts 11:26*, "The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch." Notice that in each of these instances the word is used, not by Christians speaking of themselves, but by others round about, who were looking at them.[1] The term "Christian" was a word coined from the outside rather than within.

As with so many of our later sects, so with the early Church; its members had had their experience of Christ, the group was gathered into a recognizable community, the movement was already started before it found its name or was given a name. And as with more than one of the sects, like the "Quakers," so with the Church of the first generation, its name was given to it either in idle jest or in deliberate dispraise. But again, as with some later terms, so with the term first used to describe the followers of Jesus, the word that was spoken in careless jest became in time a badge of honor.

No name could have been more appropriate than that with which the thoughtless world invested those far-off disciples in Antioch. Indeed it is hard to see how any other name could finally have been found or fashioned. Though the word remained for years uncoined and unspoken, it was from the first inevitable. We cannot improve upon it; we would not deny it. For untold disciples down the years the simple affirmation, "I am a Christian," has served as their truest self-designation. Though the Christian may never have grown up to the

[1] The passage in *I Peter* echoes the charge made *against* the early Christians.

full stature of the word, it tells him what he ought to be, what he hopes and purposes to be, and what with God's help he may at last become. It is not a word to be spoken lightly or unadvisedly, but reverently and discreetly. Even though we know only too well the gulf between that which the word at its best means and that which in character we now are, we can say with the poet, "What I aspire to be, and am not, comforts me." Professor Francis Peabody once said that when we honestly say, "Our Father who art in heaven," we rise to strength and self-respect, since we bear a scutcheon that may not be stained. So it is with this other word, "Christian"; when we use it sincerely it gives meaning and strength and serenity to life.

For the purpose of these pages, however, without intending in the least to undo all that was so truly done when the world round about them called those first Antioch disciples "Christians," we are proposing to go back of that word to the first groping quest of the followers of Jesus for some form of self-designation. We have in the *Book of Acts* a clue to just such a term, which must have been in wider and more common use than the book itself would seem to suggest. The *Book of Acts* is perhaps one of the later rather than one of the earlier writings of the New Testament, but there are in it outcroppings of the original life of the primitive Church, even though other strata have in places overlaid that life.

At the outset of Christian history the earliest disciples seem to have thought and spoken of themselves

as members or followers of a distinctive "way" of life. The reference to "this way" occurs in *Acts* before ever the Antioch usage is mentioned. It indicates, on the part both of others and of the Church itself, a felt distinction between the manner of life of the followers of Jesus and that of the vast environing world into which our religion was born.

The word "way" was not an innovation launched into our speech and letters by the author of the *Book of Acts* or those whom he is quoting. It was a simple and familiar word which had served prophet and psalmist and law-giver in Israel for centuries. It is one of the most common words in the Old Testament. Out of the vocabulary of every day our religion fastened upon this familiar term, to give it new meanings and a new direction. Once the word was spoken by the first disciples, it found its place in the New Testament, to become one of the most biblical of all words. Like other great words in the Bible, indeed in all religion, this word, which had originally a literal meaning, has become a metaphor. It has taken on symbolic meanings. What is religion? It is a way. What is Christianity? It is a way. Who and what is Christ? He is the way.

There is in the *Book of Ecclesiasticus* a lovely verse which says, "And, lo, my brook became a river, and my river became a sea" (*Ecclus. 24:31*). The little trickle of words and sentences, which first began to flow in the Gospels and Epistles, has followed a like course. They were written on fragile bits of papyrus in the latter half of the first century. The originals were lost long ago

and there is no prospect that we shall ever recover the scroll on which, for example, St. Paul wrote his chapter about charity. That first roll was copied before it had worn out, copied again and recopied. It was copied with loving care which increased with the centuries, copied from papyrus to papyrus, from papyrus to enduring parchment. It was translated from Greek into Latin and Coptic and Syriac. In due time it was given its immortality in history by printing, first in Latin, then in Greek, then in all the European vernaculars of the sixteenth century. Who can say into how many languages those far-off words have now gone; hundreds upon hundreds. Every people in every mission field has its Bible in its own tongue. St. Paul's brook and the brooks of the evangelists have become a river and that river has become a sea. Through all these processes and changes the simple words have survived. They have survived because, whatever the language employed, they presuppose elemental facts and universal experiences, common to all men in all ages and places. Other words may defy the copyist or translator; the word "way" will never trouble him or defeat him. There is no time or place in which men have not made a way, and that way has become in turn a symbol of experience and an interpretation of life.

On one of his trips into western Pennsylvania in the middle of the eighteenth century John Woolman preached, through an interpreter, to the Indians. When the sermon was over and the hearers had gone, the interpreter, who was himself an Indian, turned to Wool-

man and said, "I love to feel where words come from." His remark suggests a mature mind, but most of us can understand it. Something of this sort, then, is the purpose of these pages for our Lenten meditation; we shall try to feel where the word "way" comes from.

The word comes to us, for our present uses, from the Bible, from both Testaments. As with our picture of Jesus, so with our use of this word, we must not wrest it out of its original setting and give it meanings which were no part of its first meaning. On the other hand great sayings contain, in the very nature of the case, further meanings than their authors may have consciously intended. Father George Tyrrell once coined a phrase to describe the work of religion in history; he called it the "Divine Fecundity." In all inspired literature there is just such a divine fecundity which enables us, without violence to the original, to find meanings which may fairly be called implicit in what was said or written long ago, though not at first fully explicit.

We shall have constantly in mind in these pages the use of the word "way" in the Bible, particularly in the New Testament. But our pages are not to be a commentary pure and simple. Without breaking the continuity of thought and speech which has brought the word down from Bible times to our own day, we shall try to discover the meanings of this word for our own day, and its still fruitful and valid suggestions for the conduct of the Christian life.

CHAPTER II

THE MORE EXCELLENT WAY

ONE OF THE MOST FAMILIAR REFERENCES IN THE Bible to the "way" is that at the end of the twelfth chapter of *I Corinthians*, with which Paul launches into his classic hymn on charity. He proposes to show "a more excellent way."

The thoughtful reader of St. Paul's Epistles is struck by their recurring reference to the complexity and confusion in the life of the early Church. There were various "gifts" and "diversities of operations." There were parties and politics and rivalries. In the passage in question we meet with "apostles, prophets, teachers, miracles, healings, helps, governments, tongues" (*I Cor. 12:28*). In what St. Paul calls, elsewhere, the "edification of the church" there were many workmen doing many different things.

Each of us is inclined to believe, in loyalty to his own denomination, that he has "the more excellent way." Notice that even in his classic celebration of charity, Paul avoids the superlative "most" and uses only the relative term "more." There is here a certain reticence and self-restraint which always marks great minds.

And what of the relation of this "better way" which we all profess and share together to the other ways by which men have sought to find and reach God? Few

questions are so serious for us Western Christians as this, faced as we are by the aspiring nationalism of the East. Can we hope to convert the Orient to our Western faith? Or should we regretfully agree that "East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet."

Matthew Arnold once said:

> Children of men! the unseen power, whose eye
> Forever doth accompany mankind,
> Hath looked on no religion scornfully
> That ever man did find.
>
> Which has not taught weak wills how much they can?
> Which has not fallen on the dry heart like rain?
> Which has not cried to sunk, self-weary man:
> *Thou must be born again!*

These are relatively recent and wholly modern lines. The world has grown up to them only slowly. Indeed, each one of us has to grow up to them patiently in his own experience.

The danger of this temper is that it shall incline us to view all religions so tolerantly that we shall take no one religion seriously. In his "Christmas Eve and Easter Day," Robert Browning describes a journey which, in imagination, he took on the first of these festivals. He went to Zion Chapel Meeting, a little Nonconformist meeting house in England; then to the celebration of the midnight Mass in St. Peter's at Rome; and then to a theological lecture room in the university town of Göttingen. How was he to make sense out of the different transactions going on in these three very

different places? They were supposedly all Christian, yet they seemed to have little in common: There was the stuffy piety of the English chapel, the pomp and circumstance of Rome, the dry pedantry of the German classroom. Therefore he was inclined to live and let live, to accept them all with a mild indifference.

> This tolerance is a genial mood!
> One trims the bark 'twixt shoal and shelf,
> And sees each side the good effects of it,
> A value for religion's self,
> A carelessness about the sects of it.

Tennyson once said that in religious matters we must choose between bigotry and flabbiness. Since the modern world is weary of bigotry, it would seem to have, if Tennyson is right, no option other than the alternative of flabbiness. Such, indeed, is the situation which obtains far too generally today. But what is to be done about it?

When Philip Melanchthon lay dying, he gave thanks to God that he was at last to be delivered from the *rabies theologorum*, the madness of the theologians. He was tired of controversy. Most of us, even in less controversial times, share his impatient weariness with the ungenerous rivalries of sects and denominations. Have we not listened times without number to bitter narrow judgments which members of one church have privately passed upon some other church, and felt almost humiliated that we belonged to any church? It is true that these tempers are not uppermost in the

minds of most Christians today, that we are thinking more generously of one another than for many centuries past. But there is still, beneath the surface, as with our racial tensions, far too much ungenerous bigotry, and this bigotry seems so cruel that we are at times inclined to prefer the moral risks of flabbiness.

What is true as between the divided churches of Christendom is also true of the relation of Christianity as a whole to the other great world religions. Can we take, ought we with good conscience to take toward them the great tolerance which was written into Arnold's lines? Is it true that God has never looked scornfully on any religion which men have seriously believed and practiced? Has every great religion taught man something about the nature of God, and about his own nature?

The situation, as between Occident and Orient, is so complex and so difficult to resolve that many persons propose that we should give up foreign missions altogether, in the interests of a world-wide religious tolerance. Why should Congregationalists attempt to convert Hindus to Christianity, any more than they try to convert Baptists or Episcopalians to Congregationalism? Was not Browning right? Should we not preserve a feeling for religion as a whole, and become careless about its particular varieties?

To these questions there are, perhaps, two answers. In the first place every vital religion has within it a centrifugal energy. It is its nature to expand. It seeks not only to communicate itself but in the end to uni-

versalize itself. Once it reverses its direction, and becomes self-centered, seeking only to perpetuate itself by interior self-culture, something of its vitality has gone. The man who has experienced anything truly and felt his experience deeply must try to share it with others. Those aspects of our life which we are under no necessity of sharing are of less importance. Every great idea has a mission in history by virtue of its truthfulness, and every man who has such an idea is, in spite of himself, a missionary in its behalf. Truth has, in Emerson's words, "a necessity to be published." This interior necessity is what St. Paul called "the woe." This woe is not confined to religion; it exists in the world of politics and science and art, but it is most characteristically present in the realm of religion.

The second answer is more to our point. Whatever the advocate of flabbiness may say, religions are not all the same. There have been and there still are differences between the great religions of the world and these differences are important. Some persons hold, of course, that Christianity is the only religion in the world which deserves that designation—that all other religions are counterfeits. Indeed, in much earlier times, it was held that all these other would-be religions were devices of the devil to deceive and lure away persons who might otherwise have been Christians. To this day many a crude form of heathenism is little better than devil worship. Must we repudiate it altogether, or may we try to redirect the misdirected devotion of the savage toward the God whom we preach? And what shall be

our attitude toward the more mature and developed faiths of the ancient East, toward the religions of India, for example? Shall we concede them any worth and meaning, or shall we deplore and excommunicate them all? These are real questions which Western Christians must reconsider and answer in our time.

If we believe that Matthew Arnold was more nearly right than wrong and that we shall do well to ponder his words, it does not follow that we need go on to the indifferent tolerance which Browning tentatively proposed to himself. (When you read the rest of the poem you will discover that this was not, as a matter of fact, Browning's final solution of the problem. He realized that he should choose "his own best faith" and live by it thereafter.) Religions are not all the same.

Those of us who profess and call ourselves Christians believe, for example, that we have in Christianity "a more excellent way." There are among us those who hold that Christianity is the only one of man's countless faiths which merits a claim to the word "religion." Christianity is to monopolize the word. The problem of the reality or unreality of the great non-Christian religions of the world is one which still agitates our foreign missionary boards. One can only say that the attitude of many modern missionaries toward these alien faiths by which they find themselves surrounded in the Orient is, in the main, more generous and sympathetic than once it was.

Others would restate the doctrine of the finality and the supremacy of Christianity in different terms. Dean

Inge once said, "St. Paul understood what most Christians never realize, namely that the Gospel of Christ is not *a* religion, but religion itself, in its deepest and most universal significance." Christianity, so construed, is not to be compared with other religions, since it is the genius and the sum of all religion. Father Tyrrell came to the same conclusion: "Christianity was, therefore, not a religion, but a spirit, mode or quality of religion, which might be found in various religions, but never apart, by itself, as it were a 'subsistent quality.' " Dean Inge and Father Tyrrell are considered serious men. What they say is well worth pondering.

If, however, we continue, as is our normal habit, to think of Christianity as "*a* religion," a "thing in itself," and thus comparable to other religions, and if at the same time we give up the old idea that Christianity is the only religion, we may still claim that of the many religions which the world has known, some better and some worse, Christianity is the best. It was, I think, John Stuart Mill who once said that "after Jesus it is a question of his religion or none." Our own Josiah Royce was the soul of tolerance, yet he refused to allow the cheap and easy identification of Christianity with any and all other religions. His words are an understatement, yet in so far as understatement is often more effective than overstatement, they have the merit of that strategy.

Christianity stands before us as the most effective expression of religious longing which the human race, travailing in pain until now, has, in its corporate capacity, as yet, been able to

bring before its imagination as a vision, or has endeavoured to translate, by the labor of love, into the terms of its own real life. . . .

The Christian religion is, thus far at least, man's most impressive vision of salvation, and his principal glimpse of the home-land of the human spirit.[1]

This measured judgment may fall short of the full truth of Christianity and the claims which it can make, and perhaps ought to make, for itself. But Royce's words will serve at least as a point of departure for the inquiring mind, and will deliver us from that slough of indifference in which all religions are pretty much the same, and in which therefore no religion is taken seriously and earnestly. They are a warrant for taking Christianity seriously and for beginning to try to be as good Christians as we can, following its "more excellent way."

[1] Josiah Royce, *The Problem of Christianity* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1913), Vol. I, pp. 10, 11.

CHAPTER III

THE BEGINNING AND THE ENDING

"I AM ALPHA AND OMEGA, THE BEGINNING AND THE ending, saith the Lord" (*Rev. 1:8*).

These majestic words are a faithful transcript of the biblical idea of religion. The Bible is a description of man's pilgrimage from the Garden of Eden to the City of God. There is no literature in the world, and in particular no religious literature, in which the suggestion of constant motion is so strong as in our two Testaments. The Old Testament is the record of a people's journey begun with creation and continued in history; the New Testament proposes in God's good time to end that journey with eternity.

Our modern conception of the time required for the journey is greatly enlarged over that held by our forefathers. Archbishop Ussher calculated that this journey began with 4004 B.C. Most of us now think that it began long, long before that. So, also, of its end. In both Judaism and Christianity thus far there have always been impetuous and eager souls who thought that the end was very near; even the more coolheaded were prone to think that the future of history would be less long than the past had been. Thus, the prophet Esdras asks the angel Uriel, "Shew me then whether there be more to come than is past, or more past than

is to come. . . . And he said unto me, . . . the quantity which is past did more exceed" (*II Esdras 4:45 ff.*).

The expectation of the speedy end of the present world order and the advent of God's new Kingdom can be found all down the Christian centuries. We find it first in *I Thessalonians* and we meet it still in the many Adventist sects. Repeated disappointment that the end of the world has not come on the scheduled date is a commonplace in all the centuries. This hope deferred has made many a heart sick, has indeed been one of the occasions for what we often call man's "loss of religion."

Certain modern writers like Berdyaev have revived this old imagery of the Jewish and Christian apocalypses with direct reference to our own time. We are told that we are living at the end of the age. If the words mean that we are passing through a time of transition and readjustment in the constitution of human society, the words are undoubtedly true. If they mean that the whole life of man on earth, as we have hitherto known it, is now being concluded, the words are, as they always have been in the past, in advance of the fact. Our world will still go on, though under radically altered forms in the social order. How long it will go on, no one can dare to hazard even a guess. Man's expectation of life on this planet stretches away for millions of years to come. Our modern apocalypses, therefore, do not bid fair to be more accurate than were the ancient apocalypses, though by their overstatement they

may serve to waken us to the nature of the drastic changes through which we are now passing.

Meanwhile, the kind of Christianity in which most of us were brought up a generation ago was inordinately hopeful about the reasonable prospect of our being able to achieve, sooner rather than later, a decent earthly transcript of all that is meant by the Kingdom of Heaven. It has been said, not without reason, that the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were, for the more favored classes in the Western world, as ample and gracious a time as history has ever known. There was much that was still wrong and needed correction, but there was also the prospect that these wrongs could be soon remedied. A surface show of prosperity and well-being deceived us as to the insecure foundations of our life. That uncritical optimism ended with August, 1914. For the last thirty years we have had to reckon with a world far more imperfect, indeed far more positively evil, than we had previously supposed to be the case.

If there be today a widespread loss of interest and confidence in the Christian religion, that loss is due in no small part to the patent failure of conventional Christianity to prevent the nominally Christian lands in the Western world from piling up our whole civilization on the sunken rock of war. This rock had been imperfectly charted in the common mind, and on it, to use a New Testament saying, we have all but "suffered shipwreck." The Christian religion, men say, ought to have kept us clear of that menace and that fate. Because

it has not done so, many have now concluded that it can no longer claim or expect to receive our consent. Opinion is divided between two platitudes: "Christianity has been tried and has failed," "Christianity has never been tried." Either way the result is the same. If it has been tried and has failed, then why bother with it any longer? If it has not been tried after two thousand years, what promise is there that it can be effectively tried at this late date?

The simple truth of the matter is that these modern difficulties with the Christian religion arise, in the main, from our own ethical impatience. In the happy, hopeful days before the First World War we put most of our religious treasure in the keeping of the "social gospel," and we asked that gospel to achieve swift changes in the fabric of this world which no previous generation of Christians had ever asked or expected of their religion in so short a time. We could see prophetically the end of many diseases, of unemployment, poverty, wage slavery, slums, and even sin itself. This ethical impatience of ours was, in some measure, to our credit. It was prompted by genuine moral passion and sustained by an earnest devotion to the cause of the Kingdom which is to come on earth, as in heaven. But our impatience was based on an indifference to, if not an ignorance of, the slow processes of history. "The creature may not make haste above the maker" (*II Esdras 5:44*). A modern passion for speed had infected our religion; we thought we could outrun the patient pace of all stable progress.

Jesus' own disciples were carried away by this holy impatience of which we speak. Therefore in the parable of the pounds he had to preach his own patience to them, "because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear" (*Luke 19:11*). The lord of the parable was to go into a far country and be gone a long time before his return. There is no parable in the Gospels more timely than this; for the number of those who have supposed that the Kingdom should have appeared by now, and who are puzzled and disappointed at its delay, is very large.

Even for those of us who have not by any means lost confidence in our religion—and how can we lose faith in a religion which has yielded so many heroes of the faith in the concentration camps of Europe, and has bequeathed us so noble an army of martyrs?—there is today the inward problem of remaking what might be called our Christian expectation of life after some more enduring pattern. One of the greatest sayings in the Bible, one that is relatively unknown and all but neglected, is that in the *Book of The Revelation*, "I, John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ" (*Rev. 1:9*). We, too, like the writer on Patmos, live in a time of tribulation. It is doubtful whether anywhere at any time a Christian should try to divorce the kingdom of Jesus Christ from the patience of Jesus Christ. He certainly cannot safely do so now. Does not the apostle tell us that "tribulation worketh patience"? If tribulation works only a bitter and ulti-

mately disillusioned impatience we have broken what St. Paul regards as the sequence of Christian experience, by which we come at last to a reasonable and religious hope for ourselves and the world.

Thirty years ago we began a war to end war; at various times during the last twenty-five years we have drawn up pacts for world peace which on paper promised to last indefinitely, presumably forever. Now we have been at war again. We are much less certain than we might wish to be that this war is to be the last of all wars. Unless we are much wiser and better than we were a generation ago, the next war may be already in the making. It is a grim thought, but facts to suggest it are not wanting. Thus, Dr. Inge, who was for so many years the "gloomy" Dean of St. Paul's, said in a farewell sermon at Cambridge University, "I do not suppose that the remainder of this century will be a very agreeable time for those who would live at ease in Zion, either physically or mentally." This is a sober statement; is it necessarily a "gloomy" statement? There is no reason why it should be so construed.

In John Ruskin's *Modern Painters* there is a chapter on "Mountain Glory." At the end of the chapter Ruskin describes the death of Moses on Mount Nebo above the plains of Moab. He ventures to reinterpret the story as it stands in the Bible (*Deut. 34:1-6*). As the tale was first told Moses was to be denied entrance into the Land of Promise as a punishment for his anger and impatience in the wilderness. Ruskin, however, hazards the guess that it was not to punish Moses, but to reward

him, that, at the last, God spread before him the whole wide vista from the top of Pisgah—the wilderness behind where he and his people had wandered, the Jordan below, and the Promised Land beyond. Of the outspread scene there was no doubt: "And the Lord said unto him, This is the land which I sware unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, saying, I will give it unto thy seed: I have caused thee to see it with thine eyes, but thou shalt not go over thither." Moses died there on the mountain, and there the Lord buried him and "no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day." His last clear vision of the land that eager hearts expected, that he himself had expected to enter, was not a penalty; it was a generous recompense.

Whether Ruskin's rewriting of the record is warranted or not, the Bible is not unfamiliar with the life and lot of those who in their lifetime did not see the humanity of which they were a part actually reaching "the better country," the City of God. Of the long succession of generations which up to this time have made up the pilgrimage of faith, the writer of *Hebrews* says, "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off" (*Heb. 11:13*).

Our generation of Christians faces one or two grave questions. Are we to follow the lead of those who have given up all confidence in Christianity because the Kingdom of God has not yet appeared, and may not speedily arrive? And are we to become embittered if we have to make our peace with the fact that we may not live to reach some earthly City of God? Will time,

therefore, and the passage of time lose their importance and thus their reality, because of the grim suspicion that

> To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
> Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
> To the last syllable of recorded time;
> And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
> The way to dusty death. . . .
> Life . . . is a tale
> Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
> Signifying nothing.

This is the soul of cynicism, the ultimate skepticism, the heart of irreligion. Yet far more persons than we realize have been driven to some such bitter and disillusioned conclusion. They may put on a good face before the world, and go through the motions of a seemingly cheerful daily life, but basically they are "without hope in the world" and for their world. The sheer mass of the world's cruelty and misery has crushed their one-time hopefulness. It is not for us, in America, to sit in judgment on such persons in other lands, for we have not suffered as they have suffered. But even at a distance we are touched by their distresses and liable to their conclusions.

Years ago an American evangelist, Dr. Torrey, came to the university city of Oxford to conduct a revival. The meetings were held in the auditorium of the City Hall. The late Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple, who was then a don of Queen's College, went to one of Dr. Torrey's meetings, to see what it would be like. Afterward he said, "Torrey told us that in the

dead and dark of night his sins marched past him in a scarlet procession. I never feel that way; my sins are gray, all gray." That is the characteristic modern sense of sin. In this form it obsesses countless human beings. Life is drab and meaningless; it is lost between whatever may have been its clear beginnings and what might be its bright endings. One sometimes thinks that the sense of sin is more somber when dressed in gray than in red. When our sin is crimson it can, perhaps, be made whiter than snow. But the suggestion of a pervasive drabness is even more truly of its father the devil than the seduction of scarlet vices. How often has the housewife said, in these latter days, "The wash never comes home clean now, it is always gray with ingrained dirt." How often do our lives in these dark years seem to us gray for want of clean, clear meanings. Those who know their fellows well, know that this is the moral and spiritual problem with which they wrestle in the solitude and in the night. We are a disappointed generation, and the fact that our disappointment is of our own doing does not make it any easier to bear—perhaps only harder.

The prologue to *John* begins with a solemn verse which announces the doctrine of the "Word." The Greek is *Logos*. The term comes from Plato, from Stoic philosophy, and from Philo. Its meanings are many and go far beyond the initial connotation of "that which is said." It implies all that is meant by Wordsworth's phrase about "an eternity of thought." Modern translators, failing to find in English an exact equivalent,

usually reproduce the original Greek and let it go at that. But Professor Burkitt, the distinguished New Testament scholar at Cambridge, once hazarded, as a free translation of the first verse of the prologue, "In the beginning was a PLAN."

The *Gospel of John* opens, and plainly was intended to open, after the manner of the *Book of Genesis*: In the beginning God," and "In the beginning was the Word, a Plan." A Christian should never lose that confidence, no matter how remote the beginning may be, and how imperfectly we still understand the "Plan." Save in moments of weariness or over-sophistication, our religion has never deliberately courted irrationality. The Christian believes that the world, in its length and breadth and totality, is reasonable and that its "Plan" can be known. And for the Christian, the Plan of God is one which requires time for its realization, apparently a longer time than we had once supposed. But the lengthening of the time that the "Plan" is to require for its fulfillment should not destroy our confidence in the "Plan" itself. This, if you will, is the premise to the story of the Garden of Eden and the prologue to *John.*

As for the City of God. It is possible, indeed it seems probable, that we in our day may not live to enter it in anything like its fulfilled earthly form. Reaching the City is going to take much longer than we once supposed. The important thing is not to lose sight of the City. It is not to punish our generation, but to reassure it and to strengthen it for its part in the on-going pil-

grimage of humanity, that God still vouchsafes us glimpses of the City. Any man who believes in the reliability of the moral order ought to be able to see "Satan falling as lightning" down these troubled years. We are witnessing, on a tremendous scale in our time, the suicide of great evils. Likewise we ought to be able to see the brave pinnacles of a better world, even though they are still far off. So long as we know that it is there, we have a sense of direction and strength to go on. Let us take heart from the high words of that good soldier and holy pilgrim, Francis Thompson:

> I dimly guess what Time in mists confounds:
> Yet ever and anon a trumpet sounds
> From the hid battlements of Eternity;
> Those shaken mists a space unsettle, then
> Round the half glimpsed turrets slowly wash again,
> But not ere him who summoneth
> I first have seen. . . .
> His name I know, and what his trumpet saith.

CHAPTER IV

"I MUST GO ON MY WAY"

WE SUGGESTED IN THE LAST CHAPTER THAT, IN THE biblical conception of religion, time is necessary for the fulfillment of the divine "Plan." If time is thus necessary it must also be real.

Here, perhaps, is the most important difference between the religion of the Bible and that of some of the other great systems which the world has known. For example, the religious philosophy of Greece, in itself a noble system of thought, disbelieves in the reality of time, believing rather in what we think of as eternity. Eternity is timeless; it is a changeless order "above the smoke and stir of this dim spot that men call earth." So, also, with the religions of the East, particularly those of India.

Religions which put all their treasure in the custody of eternity are faced with the fact of change in the world. Things do not remain the same. The illusion of change is explained by appealing to the metaphor of the wheel of life, which revolves ceaselessly on its own axis. All things return in due season to their point of departure and the cycle begins again. We get a hint of this idea, introduced as an alien element into the Bible, in the opening chapter of *Ecclesiastes* (cf. Ch. 1:1-11). The sun and the winds circle round and round. Whence

events come in this world, thither they return again. The future is simply the past to be lived over again. There is nothing new; "The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be." As a whole the *Book of Ecclesiastes* falls below the general spiritual level of the rest of the Bible, and at this point it is rather unbiblical. It has gone off after other gods than the God of the "Plan." Meanwhile the metaphor of the revolving wheel suffices to explain the illusion of change.

Few of us ever puzzle our heads over the mysterious nature of time, and still fewer of us are competent to pass any judgment on the matter. It has baffled the wisest thinkers, and we shall do well to take comfort from St. Augustine's saying, "If you do not ask me what time is, I know; if you ask me, I do not know." The words are as wise as they are candid.

On the other hand this is not a problem which we can ignore. The conduct of our daily life depends very largely upon the working answer we give to the problem. Is time real or is it an illusion? Should we try to plunge more deeply into the fast-running stream of time, or should we try to escape from it? Do the things that happen in time matter eternally, or do the only things that matter exist outside of time? Can we achieve anything lasting by means of time, or does all that takes place in time pass away like a mist? Once you are invaded by thoroughgoing doubt as to the reality of time and the necessity of time for the living of the religious life as we conceive of it, the nerve of effort is cut. If the pilgrimage of life is not a journey with a

beginning, a middle, and an ending, but is rather a mere circling upon oneself, then serious effort at advancement and betterment is useless.

This is not to say that our religion does not believe in eternity, and in eternal life. It does. But the idea of eternity remains an external center of reference by which we judge the importance of happenings in time. Eternity is, as it were, the goal of time and the touchstone of time, though it is not the stuff of time. Thus Professor Alfred North Whitehead says, "I hazard the prophecy that that religion will conquer which can render clear to popular understanding some eternal greatness in the passage of time." Without such greatness time is empty and is spent in vain. With such greatness it becomes precious and necessary. Indeed, our understanding of eternity, which lies in the main quite apart from our experience, is had from certain happenings and situations which seem to us to have achieved a quality which we can only call eternal life. They deserve in their own right to last, as they are, forever without change. But these experiences are rare, and are apparently given us as a clue to the nature and meaning of life, what St. Paul calls an "earnest" of heaven.

A small Cunarder, the *Lancastria,* was once crossing the Atlantic on a westward run. (She was eventually sunk by German bombs just off the coast of France, trying to evacuate a crowded shipload of soldiers and civilians at the time of Dunkirk.) On the edge of the Grand Banks she was hit by a hurricane

which had desolated the Florida coast and then come off to sea in its northward course. The waves were mountainous, driven rain and spray cut visibility down to a few hundred yards ahead. For a couple of days the ship had to run on "dead reckoning." Yet not on dead reckoning. After the storm had passed and latitude and longitude could be taken the captain was asked how far off his course he was. He said, "Not more than a mile." For all through the storm he was getting radio beams from Cape Sable and Cape Race, and their point of intersection constantly marked the spot where the ship was. This reference to a fixed world gave him his bearings through the storm. The ocean was real, the storm was real, the voyage was real—perhaps dangerously so —but so were the beams from land. It is in some such way that eternity seems to impinge upon time. It does not impair the reality of time, but gives us our bearings in time.

Be these mysteries as they may, let us ponder for a few moments the verdict which the life of Jesus seems to pass upon this riddle of time. When the Gospels are reread with the problem in mind, is time real or unreal? One is left with an overpowering impression of the tense and even tragic reality of time and the importance of what may happen in so brief a time as that which the story covers. A single verse (in the R.V. translation) seems to let us into the manner and method of the life of Jesus: "I must go on my way today, and tomorrow, and the day following" (*Luke 13:33*).

Some years ago the French artist Tissot, after a long

stay and much study in Palestine, did a series of paintings to illustrate the Bible. One of these paintings pictured Jesus on his way up from Galilee to Jerusalem. The central rocky ridge of Judea rises some 3000 feet above sea level; therefore, whether from the coast or from the plains to the north, "the road winds uphill all the way."

In the picture in question Jesus is seen striding over the brow of the hill, a resolute figure bent forward to his journey. The disciples are seen straggling and struggling along behind him, "following afar off." A Yale philosopher, neither a churchman nor a theologian, once said that no account or interpretation of the life of Jesus could be convincing for him which did not give this strong suggestion of resolute and rapid motion which Tissot painted so successfully upon his canvas.

In Rossetti's most famous poem he says of his Blessed Damozel that

> From the fixt lull of Heaven, she saw
> Time, like a pulse shake fierce
> Through all the worlds.

There are few pages, either of history or of biography, in which one feels so strongly this fierce beating of the pulse of time as in the brief Gospel record of Holy Week, which marked the end of that journey to Jerusalem. Humanly speaking, Jesus might have avoided the cross. Now and then some wistful Christian wishes that Jesus had lived longer and taught at greater

length. There is so much more that he might have said. He chose otherwise. Perhaps he had no choice; he seems to have been driven onward by a sense of divine destiny. The full inwardness of his mind and motive are hidden from us. Plainly, however, he moved ahead of some compulsion that overrode what might have been a too human reluctance. That he felt the reluctance we know. "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt. . . . This that is written must yet be accomplished in me" (*Matt. 26:39 . . . Luke 22:37*).

Every one of those days seems "pregnant with vast consequence, loaded with fate." Every hour of those days has been devoutly pondered by disciples for centuries, and every minute of every hour seems precious. Yet through it all one feels the imperiousness of the movement of time, which will be neither denied nor delayed. Quite apart from any doctrinal interpretation of the meaning of the Passion, we find in the majestic speed which brings us up to Calvary something which, again from afar off, we recognize in the crises of our own experience. The final hours before some long parting, the day when we turn our back for the last time on what may have been for years our home and our work, the ticking of a clock in some silent sickroom where a life is ebbing fast away—at such moments it is very hard to persuade ourselves that time is not real. We cling to the hem of its garment, seeking to grasp and hold, and thus to be able to treasure, all that can be felt within the boundaries of time.

On such occasions it is beside the mark to try to persuade ourselves that time is an illusion, an artificial conduit for our stream of experience, an expedient accommodated to our limited natures rather than a reality. We hunger above all else to gather from the teaching of such hours their most inward meaning, their enduring truth, and some instinct tells us that the assurance of any such worth is to be had, not by ignoring the intense and perhaps tragic reality of time, but rather by conceding it to the hilt.

It is important to realize that the strong impression made on us by the Passion story is not produced by the intrusion of a single dramatic moment into what is elsewhere in the Bible a transcript of motionless life in a timeless world. The Passion story runs true to what is from first to last the mind of the Bible. Biographers of Jesus, like Renan, have lingered lovingly over what they call "the Galilean springtime" in his ministry, and have portrayed an idyllic character living an almost desultory life. It is fair question whether this is a true interpretation of the facts. It is more probable that from the first, once he had accepted the Messianic rôle, Jesus foresaw what its end would be; that from the outset he "steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem" (*Luke 9:51*). Certainly, so far as his conscious and deliberate fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament was concerned, his mission was one which had to take place in time, and which was to be fulfilled in time.

Cardinal Newman in his description of the celebra-

tion of the Mass has captured and perpetuated this sense of swift imperious motion in the Passion story:

> The Mass is not a mere form of words, it is a great action . . . Words are necessary, but as means, not ends. . . . They hurry on, as if impatient to fulfil their mission. Quickly they go—the whole is quick; for they are all parts of one integral action. Quickly they go, for they are awful words of sacrifice—they are a work too great to delay upon, as when it was said in the beginning, "What thou doest do quickly." Quickly they pass, for the Lord Jesus goes with them, as he passed along the lake in the days of his flesh, quickly calling first one then another. Quickly they pass, because as the lightning which shineth from one part of the heaven unto the other, so is the coming of the Son of Man.

How faithful those words are to the Gospel text, in which one senses what Francis Thompson called the "deliberate speed, majestic instancy" of Christ, the Hound of Heaven.

Wise physicians tell us that nature is kind to us as death draws near. We die as we were born, unconscious of what is happening to us. The same has been said of the end of an age. Thus the late Professor Collingwood of Oxford writes of our own time:

> What we are concerned with is the threatened death of a civilization. This has nothing to do with my death or yours or the deaths of any people we can shoot before they shoot us. Civilizations die as they are born, not with waving of flags or the noise of machine guns in the streets, but in the dark, in a stillness, when no one is aware of it. It never gets in the papers. Long afterward a few people, looking back, begin to see that it has happened.

As a historian Professor Collingwood was mainly concerned with the late Roman Empire. Therefore, the classical pattern for the death of a civilization was for him the fall of Rome. That fall was not a single event; it was a gradual process which went on over many years, even centuries. Given this premise and pattern Collingwood is undoubtedly right in saying that it is only long after the event that men, looking back, see what has happened.

It is doubtful whether that analogy holds today. Our present difficulty is not that we do not know what is happening to our age, but that we know it only too well. Thus, in mid-August, 1914, the first month of the First World War, Mr. H. G. Wells wrote a brief paper for the London *Nation.* He had been prophesying the general European war for years. No one had paid any attention to him. They said of him what was said of the prophet Ezekiel centuries before: "The vision that he seeth is for many days to come, and he prophesieth of the times that are far off" (*Ezek. 12:27*). But once the storm had broken, Wells said, "I am not prophesying now. I am running as hard as I can beside the marching facts, pointing at them."

We have no better account of our situation over the last thirty years. History is being made at a terrific pace. The incredible speeds achieved by man for his communications, his travels, his warfare in the air have to be matched by a mobility of mind such as history has never asked of man before. The marching facts hold our attention. Our mind moves with them. We cannot

wholly grasp them, much less direct them; yet we try to keep abreast of them. There may have been religious persons in some more favored age who knew what the poet calls "the lone sad, sunny idleness of heaven." That is a heaven from which we are shut out. There may once have been what another poet calls, "that majestic indolence so dear to native man." We are denied that indolence.

We are by now a war-weary generation. People are tired; in Europe they are more tired than we are here. We can understand only too well that touching inscription on an old German tombstone, "When thou callest me, Lord Christ, I will arise. But first let me rest a little for I am very weary." We can understand the plight of that historic boy in the Northern army, whom Lincoln pardoned, who was sentenced to be shot because he had fallen asleep on sentry duty. We can understand those words, human, all-too-human, in the Passion story, "And he cometh, and findeth them sleeping, and saith unto Peter, Simon, sleepest thou? Couldest not thou watch one hour?" (*Mark 14:37*).

Thus, if the Passion story is to find its transcript in the terms of our discipleship, it asks of us not merely some far-off share in "the fellowship of the sufferings of Christ"; it asks of us also the wakefulness of the mind of Christ. The fact that our time is moving at a terrific pace need not deny us our religion. The "majestic speed" of history in our day is, on the contrary, a means by which the swift story of the Gospels is made newly near to us.

Christianity today is a matter of keeping a vigil. It is wakefulness, and alertness of spirit, and quickness of imagination and sympathy. Our age puts to us in new forms the old query, "Canst thou not watch with me through this hour of time?"

CHAPTER V

THE SEDUCTION OF THE WAYSIDE

EVERY ROAD THAT MAN HAS EVER MADE HAS ITS roadside; every way its wayside.

Many of the great roads which man has built and over which he has traveled must cross a desert or a wilderness.

This was particularly true of the ancient world where our Bible was written. The wilderness of the Sinai peninsula lay just to the south, and the writers of the Bible never forgot the forty-year wanderings of Israel in that wilderness. The Arabian desert began only a few miles to the east and seemed to stretch away endlessly. The religion of the Bible is constantly aware of both wilderness and desert; their barren wastes and tedious distances passed into the thought of the Bible as symbols of certain of the more difficult periods in a man's experiences.

They stand for the plain hard fact of drudgery in human life. No wayfaring man is fitted for his life's pilgrimage until he has made his mental peace with the fact of drudgery, which occupies in every honest life what must often seem to be a wholly inordinate amount of time and space. How to get across these desert and wilderness reaches of our experience is an intimate personal problem.

Making our mental peace with the fact of drudgery involves an act of self-discipline. We think that our life is tedious, monotonous, dull. We think that by contrast the lives of other persons must be fresh and filled with constant novelty and excitement. Did not Emerson once say that every ship seems romantic, except that on which we sail? Charles Eliot is often quoted as having said that nine-tenths of his life as President of Harvard University was nothing but drudgery. Canon Sanday of Oxford told his classes in the Christ Church chapter house that three-quarters of all the honest intellectual work of the world is nothing but drudgery, pure and unrelieved. Whatever our lot and work in the world, we shall do well to accept that fact. We shall get on better thereafter.

Some years ago on an ocean crossing I had as a cabin mate a Russian who had escaped the fury of the Bolshevik revolution. He had owned large cotton factories in the old days. The revolutionists destroyed his factories and his home; he and his wife had barely escaped with their lives. One stormy night, when sleep was impossible, as the ship pitched and rolled in the storm and the cabin was dark, he broke his silence and talked about that time. He said that through the worst of it he was sustained by the memory of a story he had read long before about one of the caravan routes across the Arabian desert. Midway in that seemingly endless journey which stretched interminably behind and the road yet to be traveled seemed to reach even more interminably ahead, there was by the wayside a stone with

an Arabic inscription, which carried four words only, "This also will pass." He said that when he had nothing else to cling to, he could still hold onto those four simple words. However bad the time was, and however desperate his plight, he could reassure himself with the knowledge that "This also will pass." That is one way of keeping going on one's journey.

But there was in the old days, and there still is, another way—namely, to turn aside off the road, to step out of the line of march and to settle down by the wayside. Thus, there is in the prophecy of Jeremiah a familiar verse which says, "Oh that I had in the wilderness a lodging place of wayfaring men" (*Jer. 9:2*).

One of the most fascinating books in recent years is that written by Professor Rostovtzeff of Yale, the distinguished archaeologist, called *Caravan Cities*. It is a description of the great cities, spaced well apart, built along the ancient trade routes across the Arabian desert. They were, in sober fact, vast "caravanseries," where the never ending procession of camel trains moving back and forth stopped to rest, to recondition, and restock themselves for the next stage of the journey. They lived off the ceaseless traffic which was forever passing by them.

That, probably, is what Jeremiah had in mind—settling down in a caravan city in the desert; ministering to the passing procession, but taking no part in the journey itself. In certain moods of sheer weariness the prophet would have been glad to drop out of the march of life and watch the world go by. This is one of the most

natural and at the same time one of the most insidious temptations which can come to us. Its insidiousness lies in the fact that one can actually be of some help to the world when so situated.

So it is that we have in our collection of American verse that familiar poem by an author who wished above all else "to build a house by the side of the road and be a friend to man." There is no doubt that the world has a place for these wayside houses. Many of them have been founded in the name of religion, and sacrificially served by those who lived in them. Think of the hospices in the Alpine passes, maintained for centuries to succor travelers overtaken by blizzards. Most of us can still remember from childhood books the tales and pictures of the dogs of St. Bernard guiding the monks in their desperate work of rescue.

Yet one has the feeling that both the caravan city by the desert trail and the hospice in the mountain pass were by-products of life, even though useful by-products, rather than the heart of life and the truth of life. It was the travelers who really knew what life was like, not those who kept the house by the side of the road.

The temptation to fall out of the march of time and to settle down by the wayside is one which, for some men of a certain temperament and for all men at critical times in their life, is very real. And it is the kind of temptation to which we are peculiarly liable today.

There died in the last war a brilliant Frenchman of letters who is only now receiving belated recognition,

Charles Péguy. He was born in 1870. He used to complain of his lot in early life that it had fallen to him in a "period" of history, rather than an "epoch." A period is a listless stretch of years in which nothing important happens. An epoch is a time when much happens and history is actually in the making. Péguy lived just long enough to repent of his premature adverse judgment on his lot, and to fall at the head of his company in the First Battle of the Marne. That was thirty years ago, but from that day to this no man living has had reason to complain that he has been born into a period. We are living through an epoch, perhaps the most considerable and critical that man has ever known. Professor Whitehead was recently asked how long it has been since the world has known as radical changes as are now taking place. He said, "If you mean the history of Europe, the answer is 'The Thirty Years' War.' If you mean the life of mankind as a whole, the answer is 'Never.' "

It is, however, a good deal of a venture to have to live through a time which has no parallel, and for which there are therefore no adequate precedents. It is all very well to prefer to live in an epoch rather than a period. But our generation, in so far as it may desire to live in an epoch, has got more than it bargained for. William Wordsworth once complained, "The world is too much with us." We might go on to add that the world we have on our hands today is altogether too much for us. We may be blamed if we curse the spite that ever we were born to set it right, but we are en-

titled to some sympathy in view of the difficulties of that assignment.

For what can any one of us—save the few responsible men at the top—actually do to "make" history today? Each has one vote; each pays his few paltry dollars toward costs that run into incredible billions. Occasionally we may be carried away by mass enthusiasm and mob hysteria, but these experiences are short-lived. There is a limit to what any one of us can do in his brief finite human life. The discrepancy between what needs to be done and what any one of us can do is so great that it seems to numb the mind and dull the heart and paralyze the will.

The truth is that no one of us can begin to grasp even in imagination, let alone in sound knowledge, the meaning of the time through which we are now passing. We can discover some of the causes of its happenings, we can grasp a few of the events, we cannot foresee its outcome. Fortune-telling and crystal-gazing are no part of religion. The highest doctrine of the divinity of Christ cannot take out of the Gospels his words regarding the outcome of time, "Of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father" (*Mark 13:32*). In such matters it is a rash venture for a Christian to try to be wiser than his Master.

Meanwhile, though we seldom stop to realize the fact to the full, we are all of us sore troubled in mind and heart by the tragic mystery of the times in which we live. The happenings of these times are on so vast

a scale, are so intricate in their interrelations and so swift in their transit, that they defeat us. Beneath the surface attention, which of necessity we give to the doing of the tasks of every day, there is a subconscious area where our minds are now chronically and constantly uneasy. No one of us knows, or can hope to know, what the last thirty years have done to his mind. They have taken away its sense of security. The religious man should always have what Wordsworth once called "central peace subsisting at the heart of endless agitation." He will be aware of what Francis Thompson called

> The hold that falls not when the town is got,
> The heart's heart, whose immured plot
> Hath keys yourself keep not. . . .
> Its keys are at the cincture hung of God.

Nevertheless the central peace of our heart's heart no longer comes to us in the course of nature and history. It is something to be achieved and thereafter held in spite of ceaseless agitation and in the face of countless foes to one's quietness of mind.

If they are right who tell us that the conscious life of the mind is constantly conditioned by its unconscious life, we live today with uneasy minds. As St. Augustine said in the memorable sentence which opens the *Confessions*, "Our hearts are restless." If the inward tale of these years could be told, its outward wars and rumors of wars would be matched by the record of solitary struggles which single individuals have had with a

sense of insecurity and perplexity at the core of life. These private struggles never get into the papers and in the formal sense of the word they make no history. But they are part of the total spiritual history of our day.

Therefore, when the world seems not merely too much with us, but also too much for us, we are tempted to drop out of the line of march and to try to find at least a temporary lodging in some house by the side of the road. The sense of relief which may be had from a renunciation of responsibility is tremendous. The fresh zest of life to be had from turning spectator rather than combatant is great. The British soldier has a phrase about wounds that mean "Blighty." He may want to get back into the fight again, but for the moment he is human enough to be glad of the chance to be out of it, and to go home. "Blighty" is not the battlefield; it is the place from which one watches the battle. Many civilians in these days are mentally so hurt or tired that "Blighty" is the only place which attracts them. They have stood all they can stand and are entitled to a respite. They are the aged in all war-scarred and occupied lands; they are overworked men and women in factories; they are professional persons who have tried to do more than they are able, in doing double and triple duty in their communities; they are in particular those whose homes have heard, not once, but twice and thrice, what John Bright, in one of the greatest speeches of the last century at the time of the

Crimean War called "the beating of the wings of the Angel of Death."

The rôle of the spectator is, as the world goes today, one which has achieved a recognized, independent status. The news analyst to whom we listen every evening over the air, the reporter whose cables home from far away we read in the papers, the photographer at whose grim shots we gaze as we turn the pages of the picture magazines or sit through a newsreel at the movies—these are all spectators, not combatants. It is true that some of them run into danger and some of them have died. But they have died as onlookers, not as participants. Meanwhile, by becoming merely sensitive plates on which the time may record itself, they are, par excellence, dwellers in our modern "caravan cities."

But there is a danger in wittingly and willingly settling down in any one of these lodges by the wayside. At the best one is living a secondhand life off the experience of others. And somehow there is bred in the soul of the inglorious spectator a wholly fictitious sense of superiority, as of one "above the battle." To listen to the crowd jeering at players in a ball game or overhear the military strategy of armchair generals around the fire at the club is to realize how far removed that type of mind is from firsthand life, how specious its assumptions of skill and knowledge are. Chesterton once said that the critics of Dickens complain that there are not, and never were, characters such as Dickens created. Yet, he goes on to say, if any one of those

critics could succeed, by some superhuman effort of the imagination, in creating a single Micawber or Sairey Gamp, "he would have to spend the rest of his life being wheeled around in a bath chair at Bournemouth."

An English Quaker, writing of these matters not long since, says with profound truthfulness, "Those who share the Christian faith may continue to be convinced that the light cannot be overcome by any darkness. But they must make this judgment from the midst of the darkness, not as spectators from the covered stands of some arena." When you see what life in the house by the side of the road does to the character of men, how it breeds in them false pride and specious virtues, you understand that all such houses are a moral temptation and not a safe city of spiritual refuge. So long as he has strength and sanity and patience, a man ought to keep on the open road and "go on his way." It is better for a man's soul to share the action of his time than to be merely a looker-on.

At their best, religious men have always known this to be true, and felt it so. There was once a tired and temporarily defeated man, who felt the seduction of the lodging place in the wilderness, and as the story begins, "He went a day's journey into the wilderness" in preliminary quest for some such place. The story ends otherwise. "The word of the Lord came to him, and he said unto him, What doest thou here, Elijah? . . . Go, return on thy way" (*I Kings 19*).

It is in this vein, and running wholly true to the

temper of the Bible, that Richard Watson Gilder ends his "Credo":

> Lead me, yea lead me deeper into life,
> This suffering human life, wherein thou liv'st
> And breathest still, and hold'st thy way divine.
> 'Tis here, O pitying Christ, where thee I seek,
> Here where the strife is fiercest; where the sun
> Beats down upon the highway thronged with men.[1]

"It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord" (*Matt. 10:25*).

[1] Richard Watson Gilder, *Credo* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company).

CHAPTER VI

THE TWO WAYS

SOME SEVENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO A SCHOLAR OF THE Greek Orthodox Church discovered in an eleventh-century manuscript a lost, and therefore long unknown, Christian treatise of a very early date. It is known as the *Didache*, "The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles."

This work is a church manual, dating probably around the year 100 A.D. It falls into two parts. Its latter half gives directions about church rites and orders; it deals with baptism, the Lord's Supper, prayer and fasting, the treatment of prophets, and the like. It contains, in particular, the lovely prayer for use at the Communion service about "the broken bread scattered upon the mountains, gathered together and made one."

The first half of the *Didache* is a discussion of Christian morals called "The Two Ways." It is supposed that this section, though fully Christian in its present form, may go back to Jewish sources. As it stands, the *Didache* opens with the simple and sweeping statement, "There are two ways, one of life and one of death, and there is a great difference between the two ways." The treatise then goes on to describe at some length each of these two ways and to warn Christians

"lest any man lead you astray from this way of righteousness."

The metaphor of "The Two Ways" is truly and fully biblical. Whether it be the Old Testament or the New Testament there is in the Bible this constant suggestion of life standing at a parting of the ways, and of the necessity of a choice between them. So, we read in Jeremiah, "Thus saith the Lord; Behold I set before you the way of life, and the way of death."

Thus the Psalmist says there is "the way of lying . . . the way of truth." The writer of *Proverbs* gives us his somber picture of "evil men who walk in the ways of darkness," and bids us "walk in the way of good men." Or again he contrasts "the way of the wicked . . . and the way of the righteous." These phrases ring through the pages of the Old Testament like some great bell: "The way of wisdom . . . the way of peace . . . the way of life . . . the way of holiness . . . the way of understanding . . . the way of righteousness." In the New Testament this classic Jewish usage, with the distinction which it implies, is given new birth and a new solemnity in the familiar words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount: "For wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction. . . . Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life" (*Matt. 7:13, 14*). If our Christianity ever loses this sense of a difference in conduct and character, and of a choice to be made and made ever again at each parting of the ways, it will have lost a quality which

was characteristic of it at the first and which is always necessary to it, when it is true to itself.

This picture of the two ways rests the case for religion primarily upon the testimony of conscience, rather than on evidences from nature and history. The prophet Isaiah once said of God, "Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself" (*Is. 45:15*). That statement long ago took classical form in the doctrine of the *Deus absconditus*—the God who is withdrawn and hidden from us. One of the greatest Christian thinkers of all time, Blaise Pascal, made this doctrine central in his system. "Scripture says that God is a God who hides himself. God being thus hidden, every religion which does not say that God is hidden is not the true religion."

Pascal felt the mystery of the universe and of human life. He did not fall into what has been called "the vice of oversimplification." He did not find that the processes of nature gave a religiously clear account of themselves. "I look on all sides," he says, "and see nothing but obscurity; nature offers me nothing but matter for doubt and disquiet." History served him no better. The act of religious faith was for him, therefore, not matter-of-fact consent to what is patently true in the external world; it was a genuine venture involving a real risk, prompted by a principle that is within.

It has been said that there is a type of mind which likes to kick up a dust and then complain that it cannot see. There is no reason to make the act of religious faith unnecessarily difficult. But, conversely, it is a mistake to suggest, as many popular preachers do, that

God, who is the object of religious faith, is so plain and clear that a man who does not believe must be either stupid or wicked.

One of the two or three greatest sermons in recent American Congregationalism is that preached by Charles E. Jefferson at the meeting of the National Council of Congregational Churches at Kansas City in 1912. The first half of his text was taken from the *Book of Job*: "Oh, that I knew where I might find him. . . . Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: on the left hand where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him" (*Job 23:3, 8, 9*). It is unjust to the author of that great book to suggest that in this passage he was merely kicking up a dust and then complaining that he could not see. His dilemma and his distress were genuine. Job's ancient cry prompted Dr. Jefferson's sober modern statement:

> The most difficult article of the creed is the first one, "I believe in God." Those who think most know this best. The universe which science has discovered is a vast machine. Its wheels turn inexorably and remorselessly. The winds are pitiless and the stars are cold. Not only is nature indifferent to our cries . . . she shrieks against the Christian creed. History shrieks even louder than nature. It is longer than we supposed; how long no man knows. From the beginning the life of man on earth has been tragedy. The earth has been soaked again and again with blood. Pyramids have been built of human skulls. Empires have risen only to sink in smoke and agony. Races have flourished for a season and then vanished into

oblivion. When one stands in the midst of the vast plain of human history, with the tombs of empires and races at his feet, and the past rises before him hideous and gory, it is not easy to stand between the vast machine of nature, and the vast slaughter house of history and say with a voice that does not falter, "I believe in God the Father Almighty."

Those words were written and spoken two years before the First World War. All that has happened in the meantime only goes to make them more tragically true. If you find it easy to look with level eyes today at the slaughterhouse of history and say with unfaltering voice that a loving God is manifest through all which is now happening, you are more fortunate than most of us. Truly the God of history, like the God of nature, is a God who has hidden himself. Clouds and thick darkness are round about him.

Therefore, at those times in life when an oversimplified faith in a God revealed in nature and history is hard to hold, we are thrown back upon that other "proof" of God, if we care to use so strong a word, which we find in the witness of conscience.

We all know that sociologists and psychologists are able to give a secular, nontheological account of the origins of conscience. The promptings of this strange inner voice are attributed to the far-off, forgotten rules which governed the life of the primitive tribe. They are said to be the sum of the tabus and the permissions which society has developed to insure its own solidarity and survival. Or, again, the voice of conscience is described as a survival of the primitive instinct of fear

and an instinctive expression of the will-to-live. In all such familiar statements there is, of course, a measure of truth. Conscience, down the centuries, has altered its judgments; things that were once held to be forbidden are now allowed; that which was once permitted is now prohibited. We have seen, over the centuries, a process going on which we can only call the slow education of conscience. Thus, the first Christians apparently had no moral scruples about slavery as an institution, yet such scruples were in due time developed. Christians finally grew up to the idea that, whatever its mitigating features, slavery is wrong in itself. Therefore, the plain fact of the relativity of the judgments of conscience at any given moment in history, or even in the life of the single individual, has warranted many persons in dismissing the principle of conscience as being itself merely a by-product of the processes of growth.

Most of us feel, however, that this inner monitor cannot be so easily analyzed and so cavalierly dismissed. When the sciences of man have done the best they can to describe in their own terms the witness of conscience, we are left dissatisfied and still uneasy. Life is ultimately mysterious, and in the mystery which is life, nothing is more mysterious than the utterances of this still, small voice.

Very few men have really succeeded in ridding themselves of a respect for conscience. The thing is too deep rooted to be eradicated easily. You silence its voice and

it reasserts itself. So it is that Arthur Hugh Clough says,

> Like a child
> In some strange garden left alone,
> I pace about the pathways of the world,
> Plucking light hopes and joys from every stem,
> With qualms of vague misgiving in my heart
> That payment the last will be required,
> Payment I cannot make, or guilt incurred,
> And shame to be incurred.

Therefore, since nature and history do not manifest their God so plainly that he who runs may read, many a sensitive soul has finally decided to rest the case for God and religion upon this strange inner light and voice. Father George Tyrrell says,

> The rock of irresistible reality is Conscience—the sense of Right and of its absolute claims. No analysis, no explaining away can permanently destroy this faith or lay the ghost. Yet faith it is, and not understanding or inference, nor experience in the narrower external sense. And it is faith *in God*. . . . Only Conscience can say, "Thou shalt have none other Gods but me; thou shalt not bow down to them nor worship them; for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God." Hence Faith in the directive Power which my understanding figures to me, now as Conscience or as my Conscience, now as God or as my God, is for me the one immutable foundation stone of the life of religion. . . . It is Faith then, Faith in Conscience, in God, in the Right, that puts me in touch with reality. . . . Conscience is the depository of the notion of Deity.[1]

[1] George Tyrrell, *Essays on Faith and Immortality* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1914), pp. 1-13. (May I add that I think

All religion is, in some form or other, a matter of correspondence between man and his environing world, of communion between man and God. Paganism is the correspondence of the natural man to the world of nature round about him. Humanism is the correspondence of social man to his fellow men. Christianity is the correspondence of moral man to the character of God.

Carlyle says that the "greatest moment in the modern history of men" was that marked by the Diet of Worms, when in April, 1521, Martin Luther stood before Charles V to defend himself against the charge of heresy. Luther ended his brave and lonely stand on that occasion with the historic words, "It is neither right nor safe to act against conscience." Luther spoke as a prophetic Protestant; Father Tyrrell was writing as a reminiscent though rebel Catholic. Each was standing with his back against the wall; each sought a position from which nothing could dislodge him. Both together stood upon "the rock of irresistible reality which is Conscience."

An American visiting in Oxford in the late summer of '39 went to consult a solicitor on a matter of business. The solicitor had little interest in the business in hand. He preferred to talk about the state of the world. He began by saying, "The most sobering fact we face is a general decline of conscience in the Western world." We hear much today of the loss of religion in

I owe more to the writings of Father Tyrrell than to those of any other modern author, in my endeavor to understand what the Christian religion was at the first, what it always has been at heart, and what therefore it should be. W.L.S.)

our time. The English solicitor had put his finger unerringly upon the cause and the nature of that loss; it is primarily a matter of the decay of conscience, a blurring of the felt distinction between good and evil, a mounting indifference to the imperatives of what is right and the seduction of what is wrong.

As long as our conscience is quick and sensitive, we know that the choices with which it confronts us cannot be shirked. One of the most famous essays of our time is that by William James, "The Will to Believe." He took as his text Pascal's classic account of "the wager." Pascal's language was bold and is still too bold for many a timid Christian, but it was unequivocal. Our whole life, he says, is nothing but one great wager. "God is or he is not. To which shall we incline? A game is playing at the extremity of an infinite gulf in which heads or tails may turn up. What will you wager? For you must wager; this depends not on your will, you are embarked upon the affair." It is upon this last point that James went on to rest his case for "the will to believe." Life, he says, confronts us constantly with options. "They may be—1, *living* or *dead*; 2, *forced* or *avoidable*; 3, *momentous* or *trivial*. . . ." The kind of option with which religion confronts is of a "forced, living, momentous kind." The choice which it offers is imperative and important and unavoidable.

There is, then, one thing a man cannot do about religion; he cannot do nothing about it. The assumption that one can postpone the choices with which it confronts him is wholly mistaken. There was a memorable

moment when Pontius Pilate was faced with Jesus of Nazareth. His wife came to him with what seemed to be the best advice that could be had: "Have thou nothing to do with that just man" (*Matt. 27:19*). Pilate tried to follow that advice, thought indeed that he had done so. He publicly washed his hands of his prisoner and his problem and dismissed them both from his mind. He may well have succeeded in deceiving himself. Thus Anatole France, in his dramatic story, "The Procurator of Judea," pictures Pilate in exile in Gaul at the end of his life. He is reminiscing with a friend. The friend says something about a certain Galilean rebel whom Pilate had sent to his death on a cross. What was his name? Pilate racked his memory in vain. He could not remember the name; the man was a forgotten entry on a crowded police blotter. This might well have been so. The psychology of the story is right.

But that is not the way in which the world has appraised Pilate's part in Good Friday. It has been said that the first, and in some ways the simplest, of all the historic creeds of Christendom, the Apostles' Creed, bristles with difficulties for the modern man, but that there is one statement in that creed about which there is not the slightest doubt, and in which we may all believe with confidence: "And was crucified under Pontius Pilate." Pilate had chosen.

Something of all this sort, then, is implied by the metaphor of the parting of the two ways, at which a moral choice must be made. When we stand at the place where the road divides between right and wrong

we are, as Pascal says, embarked upon the affair. We cannot go back, we cannot stand still, we must go on. The choice we have to make at such a time is "living, forced, and momentous." In the words of the *Didache*, "There are two ways, one of life and one of death, and there is a great difference between the two ways."

CHAPTER VII

THE WELL WORN PATH

THE TWO ORIGINAL WORDS, ONE IN THE HEBREW of the Old Testament and the other in the Greek of the New Testament, which are translated "way" mean the same thing in both languages. They mean "a well trodden path."

The basic idea of a "way" is therefore that which is traditional, customary, habitual. We have heard a great deal in recent years about "the American way of life," which we have been trying to safeguard and defend. We all understand what is meant by that phrase. It is the sum of the manners by which we conduct our daily life, together with the traits which may be said to be characteristic of us: the ordinary apparatus for physical comfort in our homes, our methods of doing business, our amusements, our generally accepted morals, our individual initiative, our love of liberty. The word so used—"the American way of life"—is a metaphor once removed from the original physical fact, but it is one of the oldest and, on the whole, one of the most useful metaphors which man has ever employed. It stands for the settled, familiar pattern of conduct and character.

This figurative use is, as a matter of fact, the form in which the word is most often found in the Bible.

For the Bible is constantly talking about the ways of God and the ways of man, the ways of the righteous man and the ways of the evil man. In our modern vernacular we might translate the "ways of God" as the "laws of God," and the "ways of man" by the now fashionable term "mores," of which students of the social sciences make such constant use. It is in precisely this sense that the word, as an intelligible commonplace, was used by the first Christians and of the first Christians. They had a recognizable pattern for living by which they could be identified.

Religion, so construed, is therefore not a matter of some isolated department of life, or some occasional interest. It is the major substance of the life of every day. Browning says,

> Religion's all or nothing; it's no mere smile
> O' contentment, sigh of aspiration, sir—
> No quality o' the finelier tempered clay
> Like its whiteness or its lightness; rather, stuff
> O' the very stuff, life of life, self of self.

There are very few of us who have reached the point at which we can say that religion is the whole of our life, and all our life. Most of us are divided personalities still, with stubborn unconquered areas of irreligion holding out against our better self. Yet this idea that religion ought to be a matter of all or nothing is one to which in theory we consent. This is, plainly, the New Testament account of "the simple life," since the basic fact underlying the conception of simplicity is that of

singleness. "Simple," says the dictionary, means "single, uncompounded, uncombined, uninvolved, not complicated." Our natures and characters are, alas, usually involved and complicated. Our souls are still, to use the old picturesque figure of speech from the Middle Ages, a battlefield where God and the devil are fighting for the mastery. Yet most of us in maturity realize that, unless we are slowly becoming more religious than we were, we are inevitably becoming less religious. We do not stand still in so vital a matter as this; we are moving in the direction of either the all or the nothing.

Religion, so construed, ought therefore to become more and more a matter of well trodden paths for the conduct of life. It should become the settled habit of our minds and hearts and wills. It should be our mental and moral second nature.

Here, however, is the ground for much of the distaste for religion which we meet in many persons, and the occasion for not a little of the sober criticism of the Church. We have been living through a time when many persons, particularly the young, have been impatient of settled patterns for life. Rebel youth has been in revolt against the conventions. The arts—architecture, sculpture, painting, music, letters—have been in recent years deliberately and resolutely unconventional. Only by such conscientious unconventionality, we are told, can one hope to have a firsthand life, and escape from the tedious treadmill of a secondhand and second-rate existence.

Many of our modern rebels regard their revolt as a

moral duty which they owe to themselves and to society, rather than as a means for getting private pleasure. There is a memorable passage in St. Augustine's *Confessions* in which he describes the part he took as a lad with a gang of boys stealing pears from a neighbor's orchard. He says it was not the pears he wanted, for as soon as he had taken a bite of one he threw it away. It was rather "the lusciousness of the sin" which he enjoyed, the quality which attached to the act and the interpretation he placed upon it. So it is with much of the ethical unconventionality of our time. It is not the actual yield of the act itself which satisfies, it is the connotation of the act—its cultural "naughtiness," the sense of having thrown off outside controls and of having an independent life of one's own.

One of the most serious criticisms of the Church in modern literature is found in William James' famous *Varieties of Religious Experience*. "Churches, when once established," he says, "live at second hand upon tradition." He much prefers the single vivid personalities who gave him the text for his book, those striking individuals for whom "religion existed not as a dull habit, but as an acute fever rather." The basic trouble with churches, he implies, is their inevitable tendency to practice chronic rather than acute religion, to lapse into a dull habit of settled forms of worship and conventional morality. We cannot wholly deny the warrant for this judgment.

Thomas Huxley once said, "The most sacred act of a man's life is to say and to feel, 'I believe thus and thus

to be so.' All the greatest rewards and all the heaviest penalties of existence cling about that act." When this act is standardized it tends, in spite of all conscious effort on our part, to become wooden and lifeless. How many of us succeed in thinking intently on each of the phrases and clauses and sentences of the Lord's Prayer when we say it? How many of us consciously attempt to realize to the full the truth and worth of each affirmation in our creed, when we repeat it? How sadly close to the debased fact are those lines with which Richard Watson Gilder begins his "Credo," from which we quoted on an earlier page:

> How easily my neighbor chants his creed,
> Kneeling beside me in the House of God.
> His "I believe" he chants, and "I believe,"
> With cheerful iteration and consent—
> Watching meantime the white, slow sunbeam move
> Across the aisle, or listening to the bird
> Whose free, wild song sounds through the open door.
>
> Thou God supreme—I too, I too, believe!
> But oh! forgive if this one human word,
> Binding the deep and breathless thought of thee
> And my own conscience with an iron band,
> Stick in my throat. I cannot say it, thus—
> This "I believe."

William James would have agreed with Huxley that saying "I believe" is the most sacred act in a man's life, and with Gilder that when we say it mechanically, merely as a matter of dull habit, the words lose all

their meaning. We have here, without any doubt, one of the reasons, perhaps one of the main reasons, why people do not go to church today, or having gone then fall away. What goes on in church seems perfunctory, and persons who are impatient for firsthand experiences cannot be satisfied with the conventional custom, which seems so often little better than a counterfeit.

The case, however, is by no means as simple as this. Let us take those persons whom James chose as his subjects; they are the world's saints, its religious geniuses. These are, to repeat his familiar words, persons in whom religion burns "as an acute fever." But the human frame cannot stand an acute fever for an indefinite length of time. Unless the fever abates the patient dies. Nor is there any suggestion in the classical literature of religious devotion that the saints ran an uninterrupted spiritual high temperature. They had their moments of inspiration, insight, and high communion with God, but if their testimony is to be trusted these moments were rare and brief.

John Masefield says in one of his sonnets,

> These myriad days, these many thousand hours,
> A man's long life, so choked with dusty things,
> How little perfect poise with perfect powers,
> Joy at the heart and Beauty at the springs,
> One hour, or two, or three, in long years scattered,
> Sparks from a smithy that have fired a thatch,
> Are all that life has given and all that mattered.[1]

[1] From *Good Friday and Other Poems,* by John Masefield. By permission of The Macmillan Company, publishers.

These lines are much nearer the autobiographies of the saints than is the suggestion that all their life was uninterruptedly a thing of "joy at the heart." Indeed, precisely the contrary is true. The stubborn recurring problem which appears in every major manual of religious devotion is how to get on with life when certainty and joy are denied us. The mystics have standard terms for this period of life; they call it "dryness, barrenness"; the technical term is *accidie*, which means sloth, torpor. The mystic has his seasons when he runs, spiritually, "an acute fever," but much of the time he seems to suffer from what can only be called a subnormal temperature.

The most popular and the best known of all the works of Christian devotion is undoubtedly *The Imitation of Christ*. The *Imitation* is very far from burning as an acute fever on every page. Turn its pages and read its chapter headings:

THAT A MAN OUGHT TO EMPLOY HIMSELF IN WORKS OF HUMILITY WHEN STRENGTH IS WANTING FOR HIGHER EMPLOYMENT

Son, thou canst not always stand fast in the ardent desire of virtues: nor persist in the higher degree of contemplation; but thou must sometimes by reason of original corruption descend to inferior things. . . .

As long as thou carriest a mortal body: thou shalt feel weariness and heaviness of heart . . . thou canst not employ thyself unceasingly in spiritual studies and divine contemplation (*Bk. IV:Ch. li*).

THAT A MAN SHOULD NOT BE TOO MUCH DEJECTED WHEN HE FALLETH INTO SOME DEFECTS

Son, I am more pleased by patience and humility in adversities: than by much comfort and devotion when things go well.

Thou art man and not God. Thou art flesh, not angel. How canst thou always abide in the same state of virtue; when this was not given to an angel in heaven, nor to the first man in Paradise? (*Bk. IV:Ch. lvii*)

Furthermore, the saint knows that any attempt to force up his temperature to the fever mark is both useless and immoral. He knows that God gives the hours of "joy at the heart" when and as he chooses. If there is one verse in the Bible which the saint has verified in his own experience it is that which says, "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit" (*John 3:8*). John Tauler has a very strong, an almost savage, phrase with which he condemns any attempt to tamper with one's religious emotions in an effort to raise their temperature. He says, "It shall be counted to a man for spiritual unchastity."

William James is right in saying that the saints are religion's real thing, indubitable and firsthand. He is right in saying that "personal religion should seem the primordial thing," from which all institutional religion is once removed. At the time he wrote his book, forty years ago, we needed to be recalled to this initial fact. But unless one reads carefully between the lines one is led to suppose that personal religion burning as an acute fever is a commonplace in human experience, to be had by anyone for the asking. Bernard Shaw

once said that it is a mistake to suppose that the world is divided into two classes, the religious and the irreligious. The truth is, he adds, that in every age there are a few, a very few, passionately religious persons and an equally few passionately irreligious persons; the great majority of people live in a lukewarm midworld, neither hot nor cold, eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage.

The saint and the prophet and the mystic are, in history and society, rare persons rather than commonplaces, and within the limits of their private experience the seasons of their glad certainty were few and brief; while seasons of dryness and barrenness were many and long. St. Teresa spent a lifetime of rigorous spiritual regimen in the hope that God might vouchsafe her the crowning hour of the mystic's certainty and joy. God never did. She was a saint who was denied the final warmth of the acute fever. The truth of the matter has been put in a pithy epigram, "One hour of Transfiguration to forty days in the wilderness is the normal average."

There is one other aspect of this emphasis upon intense personal experience, particularly of a firsthand and unconventional kind. Unconventionality is short-lived. The growing crustacean sheds his shell when it becomes too small for him. He is for a little while free of the hard carapace of custom. He feels emancipated in himself, he is tender and pliable and can expand. But his "soft-shelled" days are few. In self-defense he begins to secrete at once a new shell which

shall serve him in the future as its predecessor served the past.

So it is with our habits of life. We rebel against custom and habit as being matters of lifeless mechanism. We deliberately shed them in the quest for a more spontaneous way of life. But the permutations and combinations of the ways of doing the repeated necessary acts of human life are not infinite in number. There is a human limit to the modes of unconventionality. If the greeting at the beginning of the day, "Good morning," seems a dull custom, stale with long usage, one may forsake it in favor of "Nice day," or "How did you sleep?" but the number of possible substitutes is limited and they are soon exhausted. If you are a rebel against the conventional "Good morning," you will have to settle down eventually on an alternative. You may well drift finally into "Nice day," but then the question arises whether your new convention will wear as well and as long as the old one.

So, you may take William James at his word, and stay away from church—not because churches are hypocritical or mistaken in their theology, but merely because they "live at second hand upon tradition," while you are "a wild free thing" that must have an untrammeled life. After you have read the Sunday paper through—a stated act which you would not think of omitting—you get out your ceremonial golf clubs and put on your ritual vestments, sweater and slacks, and go out to the golf club. If there are any more ceremonious or ritualistic places in our America

than the locker room and the first tee at the country club, I should like to be introduced to them. For country clubs, too, "live at second hand upon tradition."

So it is with the run-of-the-mill liberal, or radical, or nonconformist. His unconventionality passes very soon through its brief "soft-shelled" stage, and he secretes around him his new conventions. The editorials of the *New York Times* can be trusted to be safely and soundly conventional; but so can the editorials of the *New Republic* and the *Nation*. Be not deceived, brethren, the problem is not ultimately that of perpetual spontaneity against dull habit, of unconventionality against conventionality. It is, in the long run, that of one set of habits against another, of one set of conventions against another. Some spontaneous and unconventional ways of thinking and behaving take root in society, live and flourish. These new rebel ways of life are the happy "mutations"—to use a word the biologists employ—by which the race is got forward. But other unconventional ways of thinking and behaving, and these are in the vast majority, fail to survive. They are the seed that falls on hard ground, or among thorns, or is picked up by the birds. They do not meet human nature's daily need, or they fall victim to life's cares. Somehow or other, though they may have been well meant, they did not have the heart of the matter in them.

The problem of some "way of life" persists, therefore.

CHAPTER VIII

THE HIGHWAY OF HABIT

IT HAS BEEN SAID THAT CONSISTENCY IS THE BUGBEAR of little minds. If so, William James, whose criticism of churches we cited in the last chapter, cannot be accused of having had a little mind. He objected to churches because their religion was "chronic," habitual. But in his *Talks to Teachers* he has an eloquent and convincing chapter in defense of "The Laws of Habit."

It is unfortunate [he says] that when people use the word "habit," in the majority of cases it is a bad habit they have in mind. But the fact is that our virtues are habits as much as our vices. . . . Habit is a second nature. Ninety-nine hundredths or, possibly, nine hundred and ninety-nine thousandths of our activity is purely automatic and habitual. . . . The teacher's prime concern should be to ingrain into the pupil that assortment of habits that shall be most useful to him throughout life. Education is for behavior, and habits are the stuff of which behavior consists. *We must make automatic and habitual, as early as possible, as many useful actions as we can.* There is no more miserable human being than one in whom nothing is habitual but indecision. Full half the time of such a man goes to the deciding or regretting of matters which ought to be so ingrained in him as practically not to exist for his consciousness at all.[1]

[1] William James, *Talks to Teachers* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1915), pp. 64 ff.

If this is true for teachers, why not for ministers; if it ought to work in schools, why not in churches? It may well be that one of the main reasons for going to church week by week, and year after year, is that we may thus make automatic and habitual as many Christian actions as possible. We entirely misconstrue the nature of a service of worship if we undertake to guarantee to the worshiper that the service he attends will insure for him an immediate and "acute" experience of religion. The assumption that this is so is to blame for much of the disappointment with churches and their services. We should do the best we can, on our part, to be sincere and alert when we go to church. But, again, if the mystics are to be trusted, there is no guarantee that God will vouchsafe the immediately felt gift of his grace and presence at 11 A.M. on the first day of every week.

If there is any place or time at which, theoretically, one ought to feel religion "burning as an acute fever," it is surely the Communion service. The sacramentarian churches all assure us that the Lord's Supper rather than the sermon brings us nearest to God. Yet let us take counsel and, if we need it, comfort from that master of these matters, Thomas à Kempis, who says in the *Imitation*, "I am often confounded within myself and blush, that I come with such lukewarmness yea coldness to Thy Altar and the Table of Sacred Communion; that I remain so dry and heartless."

Carlyle once wrote a famous book on the "philosophy of clothes." He was discussing the disguises by which

we conceal our true selves from one another. He describes a state function at which kings, dukes, archdukes, colonels, admirals, generals, bishops are all assembled—and then "on a sudden as by some enchanter's wand the—shall I speak it?—the Clothes fly off the whole dramatic corps; and Dukes, Grandees, Bishops, Generals, Anointed Presence itself, every mother's son of them, stand straddling there, not a shirt on them." That would be a disconcerting moment, but it would be also a revealing moment. What would the unclothed, real people look like?

It is the element of pious pretense, unconscious rather than conscious perhaps, which seems to obtain in so many church services, that puts the unsympathetic observer out of sorts with churches. He knows those people in other settings. They are by no means uniformly what they seem to be when dressed up in their Sunday clothes. In his imagination he cannot help unclothing them. Thus I remember years ago chancing to glance up at the choir in a little village church, and glimpsing a lusty bass singer, head thrown back, long mustaches waving in the wind, asking the Deity,

> Shall I be carried to the skies,
> On flowery beds of ease,
> While others sought to win the prize,
> And sailed through bloody seas?

He was the Protestant butcher in a religiously divided community which had also a Catholic butcher. The meat from the Protestant shop was notoriously inferior

to that which could be had at the Catholic shop. It seemed to me quite clear that the answer to the query he proposed to God was, "No."

Likewise, I have always been very grateful to a wise old minister under whom I began my ministry for saying to me candidly one day, in his gruff outspoken way, "I don't always *feel* like preaching and praying. But if I have done an honest week's work I go to church with good conscience and do the best I can." That unpretentious, honest, realistic remark saved me at the outset of my own ministry from a deal of attempted pretense and insincerity. All this is not to say that God may not grant his presence when we are at church. He sometimes does so in unexpected ways. But like à Kempis we shall know other hours in church when we "come with lukewarmness and coldness" and "remain dry and heartless." However, that is no reason for *not* going to church this Sunday in entire good faith and with good conscience, or for staying away next Sunday.

For it is certainly one of the main offices of all our devotional practices, and of church-going in particular, to make a Christian frame of mind in us habitual rather than occasional. The trouble with far too many of us is that a Christian attitude toward the world and Christian modes of conduct are not yet our second mental nature. And not until the habit of our thought and action have become thus Christian have we any assurance that our religion is anything more than "clothes" we put on for special occasions.

To the person of non-military mind the everlasting

drilling of troops seems mechanical and silly. It is all so formal and regimented, there is so little carefree spontaneity about it. Yet officers in an army know why ceaseless drill is necessary. Only by this means can they breed soldiers whose reactions in battle will be dependable because they are habitual.

So it is with that queer, yet powerful, scheme of life known as "the code of the gentleman." As a moral ideal that code leaves a great deal to be desired. It overemphasizes some virtues and neglects others. There are gaps in it through which you could drive a yoke of oxen. Yet one is always struck by the fact that with the true gentleman his code works automatically. You know how he will react; you can depend on what he will do. He does not have to stop and ask himself, "What does a gentleman do now?" He knows already and acts accordingly. You may approve of what he does in instinctive and instant obedience to his code, or you may disapprove, but you have to admit that his code works.

One often wonders why we have not—we "who profess and call ourselves Christians"—a code that works as simply and surely as that. Why is it that, confronted with some moral problem, we have to stop and ask ourselves, "What would Jesus do?" Soldiers do not stop in the middle of a battle to ask, "What does a soldier do now?" Gentlemen do not take time off, confronted with some situation which calls for action, to ask, "What does a gentleman do here?" They know. Why do we Christians have to have "discussion

groups" to consider these matters before we do anything at all? In far too much of our modern Christianity the discussion group seems to have become "a blest communion that ne'er breaks up," and never gets anything done.

Well, one reason, of course, is this; that the problems of applied Christianity are theoretically more difficult than those which the soldier and the gentleman face. Leo Tolstoi asked himself the most relentless questions about practical Christianity, questions about the state and sex and money. These are important questions and they have to be answered. But if there was one thing that Tolstoi discovered, it was that there are no obvious, cheap and easy answers to the questions he put to himself and thus to his whole generation. Indeed, he was so far from being personally sure that such answers as he did find ought to be followed by others, that he went out of his way in his later life to say again and again that he wanted no disciples. He only insisted that we, too, should not fail to ask ourselves the questions that he asked himself. Those questions are the ultimate questions, concerned with first and last things, and answers are not come by soon and easily. The future of the peace of Europe depends, for example, in no small part upon the disposition which is to be made of Poland in the forthcoming "peace." Yet who of us can say with any certainty "what Jesus would do" about Poland? He might indeed suggest that Poland was not his affair. It is primarily "Caesar's" affair. He once did say something of the sort: "Man,

who made me a judge or divider over you" (*Luke 12:14*)? Yet Christians of the twentieth century will have to concern themselves with this problem and do something about it.

Beyond this matter of the complexity of the problems of faith and conduct in the modern world there lies the graver fact that far too few Christians have made what St. Paul calls "the mind of Christ" their mental habit. Their Christianity is an occasional or incidental way of thinking about life, not their daily custom. Those who hold to the old theory of the verbal inspiration of the Bible believe that in the letter of the Bible, somewhere, if only they "search the Scriptures diligently," there is an explicit answer to every question they are compelled to ask. They thumb its pages in this hope. They even resort to the Vergilian lot, opening a page at random, and laying a finger where it falls. For many of us such use of the Bible is no longer possible. Yet the fact remains that there are basic Christian tempers written into the New Testament, which had become the mind and heart of its authors. St. Paul's epistles are not coldly reasoned documents, compiled as the findings of a discussion group; they are the overflow of a mind and heart that were habitually Christian. Indeed, much of his writing is an attempt to communicate his "chronic Christianity" to others, and thus to mature in them a like mind and heart.

We have to attend to a great many things in this world, and not all of them are, superficially at least, concerned with formal religion. When attention is

relaxed, like a released pendulum, in what direction does your mind swing and where does it come to native rest? With many persons it reverts to pleasure, amusement, and various forms of imagined self-indulgence which we know as "day dreams." With others it reverts to some line of study or inquiry, some unfinished reading that is at hand, with still others to plans for their future in families, trades, professions. But, if we were truly Christians, our minds, when so released, would come to rest in the thought of God, of Christ, and of our needy neighbor. That was the way Brother Lawrence practiced the Presence of God in his Carmelite kitchen in the monastery in Paris. The kitchen was noisy and busy. He had many things to attend to at the same time. He set his mind to do his work and did it conscientiously, but when his "kitchen police" was over, his mind returned to its "chronic" contemplation of God. How few of us there are who can say the same of ourselves. How imperfectly Christian we still are.

One is more and more impressed by the fact that, at the critical moments in life, those which are to decide its direction and its future for a very long time to come, we are all of us dependent upon our second nature. It will be the deeper and the fixed habits of a lifetime which will decide what we do, and what we are to be. No surface rationalizings which we can muster at such a time are adequate. If we depend upon them we are helpless. When we act, we shall act finally upon the whole yield of our living thus far.

This is the plain meaning of the parable of the foolish virgins. Empty lamps cannot be filled with oil on short notice. Much of the teaching of Jesus during the last days of his life seems to have been devoted to trying to intimate to his disciples that they could not tell what life might have in store for them. His words run true to the saying, "As touching thy life, I am not sent to show thee; for I do not know it" (*II Esdras 4:52*). If we could foresee what even a normal lifetime is to ask of us we should not come up to its hours of need unprepared and empty handed. We should make provision in advance for that day. Therefore all that anyone can say of the future is what Jesus said: "Watch, for ye know not." And if Jesus' words spoken to his disciples just before his death are to be trusted, the best preparation for whatever the future may have in store is trust in the guidance of the inward Spirit of God. But with that Spirit we must be familiar—not strangers to it, seeking it frantically in an hour of crisis.

All this is particularly true of the life of a wartime generation. Confronted with its perils, its pains, and its sorrows most men feel that they need the help of religion, and would welcome its aid. We said during the last war that we were already seeing a great revival of religion. The expected revival came to little when the emergency was over. So one hears today of an awakened interest in religion. We do well to remember what a famous British chaplain of '14-'18 said of his experience at the front—that a religion come at in emergency is not the Christian religion. "The religion

of Jesus bore the severest test, the quiet of normal and uneventful days."

Modern men of science who are concerned with the mystery of the human mind tell us that the mind is like an iceberg, in that only a fraction of it floats above the level of consciousness. The bulk of it is beneath our awareness as a great subconscious mass. In these deeper areas are residual traits from the whole history of the race, indeed from even more remote forebears. Here are the ape and the tiger. Henry M. Stanley, speaking of a crisis in one of his African explorations, once said that when hunger begins to gnaw at a white man's stomach he is just twenty-four hours ahead of the black man, and only forty-eight hours ahead of the animal. If you do not believe that this is so, get and read the terrible story of the "Donner Pass"—one of the most gruesome tales of the American frontier.

But in this deeper area there is also the accumulation of our own responsible individual living. It cannot all be carried as ever present in the conscious mind. Much of our past experience sinks beneath the surface of immediate awareness. Yet it is this bulk and yield of a lifetime, however long any given life may have been, that determines our whole center of gravity, that keeps us poised and balanced. On basic moral issues, which determine the stuff of character and the normal conduct of the Christian life, our premises and our natural inclinations—to quote James—"ought to be so ingrained in a man as practically not to exist for his consciousness at all." Most of us are still far from that happy state,

yet the achievement of such a deep inner life ought to be our goal.

We talk about the habitual drunkard, the habitual criminal. We are familiar enough with this darker side of the shield of human life. We ought to be able to cite with equal frequency the "habitual Christian."

All this is implied—and is perhaps the major implication of the word—in the biblical use of the metaphor of "the way"—the well trodden path.

CHAPTER IX

THE NARROW WAY

"ENTER YE IN AT THE STRAIT GATE. . . . BECAUSE strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life" (*Matt. 7:13, 14*).

Here is one of the grounds for much of the modern objection to the Christian religion; it is said to be far too negative. The chaplains in the last war reported back to us that young men were impatient of the common idea of a Christian as one who did not do certain things: didn't smoke, didn't drink, didn't dance, didn't play cards, didn't go to the theater. Whatever the wisdom or unwisdom of any one of these prohibitions, their general tone seemed to suggest a life shorn of natural and perhaps quite innocent enjoyment. At least, that was the way the soldiers were said to feel. In the same vein many modern physicians deplore what seems to them the harsh and even harmful "inhibitions" which a too Puritan morality has imposed on us. We should be healthier and happier if we eased off the brakes.

There is, in the Bible, ground for this disaffection. The Ten Commandments, which set the stage for character and conduct, are negative in their form. "Thou shalt not . . ." They are even more emphatic in the original Hebrew. With one or two exceptions they

begin with the word "No!" The Beatitudes might be compared with the Ten Commandments, as occupying in the early Christian record the same relative place which the Decalogue has in the elder record. It is true that the Beatitudes are positive in their tone, rather than negative. Their first word is "Blessed"; the meaning is "happy." We have, thus, Christ's description of a happy life, and the principles, if not the rules, of that life. But the Gospels are not primarily a brief for hedonism, that is, for the pursuit of pleasure as man commonly conceives of pleasure. "Christ pleased not himself," whether at the lower level of creature enjoyment or at the higher level of the assertion of self-will.

It is a commonplace to say that the gentle Jesus of the Sunday School chromo is a caricature of the original. We have, however, become so accustomed to this figure that we often forget how stern and inflexible Jesus was in his judgments of men, how unsparing his demands on them were. One of the greatest classical scholars of our time was recently asked, "How long is it since you read one of the Gospels?" "Oh, a long time," he said. "Well," said his questioner, "go and read the *Gospel of Mark* in the Greek and tell me what you think of it." He gave his report when they next met. "The thing that struck me most about the *Gospel of Mark* was its violence!"

There is much warrant for this verdict. Cut off the offending hand, pluck out the offending eye, give up your great possessions, sell all you have and give to the poor. When human affections mean more to you

than love for Christ, then turn and hate your kinsfolk. Be prepared to find your discipleship dividing father from son and son from father; mother from daughter and daughter from mother. If you would come after Christ, deny yourself, and take up your cross, and follow him.

"Then shall the priest say," runs the rubric in the Prayer Book, "Hear what comfortable words our Saviour Christ saith." No one can deny the comfortable words of Christ as they are recorded in the Gospels. George Adam Smith once said that the greatest words in the whole Bible are, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden. . . ." Yet those grave, gracious, comfortable words are by no means all the words that Christ said.

> Jesus has now many lovers of His heavenly kingdom; but few bearers of His Cross. He has many that long for consolation: but few that long for tribulation. He finds many companions of His table: but few of His fast. All desire to rejoice with Him: few are willing to suffer anything for Him. Many follow Jesus into the breaking of bread: but few to the drinking of the cup of His Passion.[1]

Most of us are familiar with the comfortable words of Christ. We ought also to ponder from time to time his uncomfortable words as well. We ignore them too constantly and forget them too soon. As it was then, so now, "Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it?" (*John 6:60*) In the parable of the talents

[1] *The Imitation of Christ*, Bk. II, Ch. xi.

Jesus accepted on God's behalf the stern ascription of severity. "Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man" (*Matt. 25:24*). The parallel passage in Luke has an even more suggestive word, "Thou art an austere man" (*Luke 19:21*).

This subtle suggestion, in so many of the forms of our modern faith, of the lost austerity of the Christian religion is responsible in no small part for the lack of interest which serious-minded men have for our religion. This was the secret of Nietzsche's impatience with Christianity. It has been said that the passkey to his character and his ideas is this: He was in rebellion against his maiden aunts. He gave a new commandment to his generation: "Be hard, O my brethren, be hard." He preached this hardness to people who, in the name of Christ, had allowed themselves to become soft and sentimental. We probably need, for our soul's good, to recover the lost austerity of our Christianity, as we find it first and most faithfully in the very words of Jesus.

Why is it that so many of our scientific friends take so little interest in churches and Christianity? It is not because they are bad men, for most of them are good men. One of the reasons is this: Our portrayal of Christianity is too "soft" for them. We preach a saccharine, spineless gospel of easygoing good nature. Our world is "sweet," while the universe with which they deal is rocky, reliable, but relentless, and if not bitter then certainly astringent.

On the other hand we must not allow the hard say-

ings of Jesus to be misinterpreted. There have been and there still are religions which hold that man's spiritual goal can be reached only by the *via negativa*, the way of wholesale negation. Theoretically such religions abstain as a matter of principle from making any statement whatsoever about God. God is infinite. The moment we make a statement about God we limit him, making him less than the All. Therefore these religions lack the familiar and reassuring words which we associate with Christianity: God is a Father, loving, patient, merciful, and forgiving. Their God is an "X" in process of becoming either Zero or Infinity.

Such religions preach a life of constant warfare against matter and all that is meant by matter. Matter is evil, and no religious person may make his peace with it. Matter met in the terms of his own body is for man the test case. The religious man will not merely seek to control his body, he will abuse it and heap indignities upon it. Hence the more extreme types of asceticism which propose to humiliate and torture the body.

There is nothing of all this in the faith and practice of the Jew. Judaism was and still is an essentially healthy-minded religion. The body is accepted as a gift of God; its normal exercises and enjoyments are assumed to be the will of God. It is only when the body becomes more important than the soul that it has to be brought to heel. Then it must be disciplined. This is also the New Testament view of the problem. There is a strong strain of asceticism in the New Testament, but

it is esentially the asceticism of the athlete, who wishes a trained body to serve his purpose, rather than the asceticism of the pervert who takes an unhealthy pleasure in inflicting unnecessary pain on his body.

Modern science is quite familiar with the latter fact, and with the diseased human type which presents it. There is now a technical name for the type, "masochist." We conceive such persons to be "sick souls," mentally, emotionally and morally. It is a striking thing that, in his more recent writings, Rufus Jones should have become increasingly aware of the unhealthy strain in much so-called Christian mysticism. He has been telling us lately that Christians cannot hope to reach the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ by self torture. "I see now," he says in a recent book, "as I did not see in the early period, what a large pathological factor there has been in the lives of many mystics. . . . So far as pathological traits persisted, as they too often did, they were a liability and a handicap, not an asset. It has been by the highway of health rather than over the bridge of disease that the largest freight of truth has come to us."[2] Most of the pathological types of asceticism have been importations into Christianity from without. They have come mainly from the East, although they have found occasional welcome and lodgment in the Western mind.

When running true to itself, Christianity is not a "way of negation" either in thought or in conduct. It is

[2] Rufus Jones, *The Flowering of Mysticism* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1939), pp. 5, 6.

an affirmation; it is positive in its pronouncements; a "Yea-saying" rather than a "Nay-saying." St. Paul is explicit on this matter. He was an athletic-minded ascetic, but he was not a pathological pervert. "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection" (*I Cor. 9:27*). He proposed always in this test case to make matter his servant, but not his enemy. In some ways this is perhaps the harder type of asceticism—to the same degree, as Bernard Shaw once said, that it is harder to live for one's country than to die for it. Patient Christian discipline of the body may well be more difficult than a brutally unchristian attack on the body.

The other valid type of Christian asceticism is that represented by St. Francis, who put away this world's goods that he might be just that much freer to serve the world. If there is an athletic asceticism, there is also a footloose asceticism, unencumbered by what St. Augustine once called "the baggage of this world." Many of the most effective helpers of humanity have made up their minds to travel light in the way of worldly luggage.

Both these strains may be found in the teaching of Jesus. That teaching gives us prophetic hints of St. Paul, the trained athlete, and St. Francis, the carefree servant of mankind. The harshness, the severity of the Gospels, manifests itself only when matter, and all that is intimately meant by matter, gets in the soul's light. In the strict meaning of the term, one finds no sanctions for

the *via negativa* in the life and words of Jesus. The religious life, the Christian life, is an affirmation.

The whole biblical conception of "the narrow way" is stated in vivid metaphor in one of the books of the *Apocrypha*. (It is an unutterable pity that these books, at least the best of them, are not regularly included in our Protestant Bibles.)

> The sea is set in a wide place, that it might be deep and great.
>
> But put the case the entrance were narrow, like unto a river:
>
> Who then could go into the sea to look upon it, and to rule it? if he went not through the narrow, how could he come into the broad?
>
> There is also another thing; A city is builded and set upon a broad field and is full of all good things:
>
> The entrance thereof is narrow, and is set in a dangerous place to fall, like as if there were a fire on the right hand, and on the left a deep water;
>
> And one only path between them both, even between the fire and the water, so small that there could but one man go there at once. . . .
>
> Then were the entrances of this world made narrow, full of sorrow and travail. . . .
>
> If then they that live labour not to enter these strait and vain things, they can never receive those that are laid up for them. . . .
>
> The righteous shall suffer strait things, and hope for wide (*II Esdras 7:3 ff.*).

That last verse states unequivocally the truth of the asceticism of the Bible. There is no perverted praise of strait and narrow things for their own sake. The open sea, the city set in a broad place are, and ought to be,

our ideal and our goal. The Christian way is not one which closes in and comes to a vanishing point at a dead end. To hark back to that phrase of Browning's, "Religion's all or nothing." There are religions which appeal to men by their promise of nothingness—the extinction of all individual existence in Nirvana. Sidney Lanier says of Buddha,

> . . . all the All thou hadst for needy man
> Was Nothing, and thy Best of being was
> But not to be.

This may not be an irreligious idea; it is, however, a non-Christian conception of the religious life. Christ came among us that we might have life and have it abundantly. Our aim is not to reduce our existence to some vanishing point but to grow up to the fullness of the measure of Christ's stature. But, it is fair to say that the positive affirmations of Christianity are something more than the easygoing self-expression of the natural man. In this respect the uninhibited life, which is often so boldly preached by the moderns, is deceptive.

At a much earlier period of geologic time the Atlantic coast of North America ran some two or three hundred miles east of what is now its present line. The continent ended abruptly at that point and fell away suddenly and sharply into the ocean depths. Subsidence of the land has dropped what was once the seaboard below sea level to form "the continental shelf" of shallow water, which, well out at sea, becomes the deep ocean at what was once the shore line. It is said that

aviators flying high over the coast off New York City can see, on a calm clear day, a dark line making off to sea from Sandy Hook many miles to the east. This is the original channel of the Hudson River, as it crossed its last lap ashore to make its final plunge off the continental edge into the depths of the ocean.

One ought, thus, to be able to interpret, beneath many of the superficialities and much of the shallowness of modern life, the darker and deeper lines which mark the processes by which in history the life of man has "turned again home" to God. The Ten Commandments are negative; they pile up their prohibitions. But seen in historic retrospect they are like the Grand Canyon by which the Colorado River has cut its course to the sea. It was between those old rocky prohibitions that the race found its moral way into broader places. They are far from being the sum of religion or the goal of religion for our day. Yet it is no safer now than it was then to play fast and loose with them. "If you want to find out what the Ten Commandments mean, all you have to do is to break one of them"—to commit murder or adultery.

It is not as though that fine old metaphor of the narrow path to the city set in a broad place is peculiar to religion, or without parallel in other areas of life. You would not have to give mental first aid to any first-rate artist or scientist or athlete to help him understand what is meant by accepting strait things for the sake of wide things. For in our arts and sciences, as in our sports, renunciation and self-discipline are common-

places. Music from a great pianist or violinist in a vast concert hall seems not merely a thing as "broad as ten thousand beeves at pasture"; it seems a thing of consummate ease. But that apparent ease is deceptive. The price of it has been hours and days and years spent in strait and narrow ways of living. The history of any man who has mastered some major skill is, and apparently always must be, that of self-denial, self-discipline, a renunciation of countless harmless and valid interests, for the sake of the one thing for which he has cared most and for which he was willing to sacrifice anything else, if need be everything else.

This is a very different matter from taking a perverse pleasure in negation for its own sake. It is, on the other hand, the price of the greater affirmations. Why, then, should we as Christians quarrel with the fact of the strait gate and the narrow way? Is our Christianity worth less to us than is his skill to a tennis player? One of the national tennis champions of America, as a lad, spent all his spare time for many years in the back yard of a city apartment, serving a tennis ball at a tin can set on the top of a post sixty feet away. He went on until he was able to knock that can off the post with deadly regularity. When he had mastered the power to do that thing, he then entered the national tournament. Such a story makes one feel a little ashamed of one's petulant complaint at the "narrowness" of the Christian life.

Phillips Brooks' four lectures on "The Influence of Jesus" are in some ways his greatest bequest to us.

One passage in particular serves our present argument. It is Brooks' comment on what has seemed to many persons the lack of aesthetic interest in the Gospels, and thus on the part of Jesus himself. There is, he says, no disparagement of the love of beauty in the teaching of Jesus, no dispraise of lovely things. It is only that for Jesus there were other things that had to matter more. "There is no condemnation of those things in which only the aesthetic nature finds its pleasure, in that wise deep life. But the fact must always remain that the wisest and deepest life that was ever lived left them on one side, and was satisfied without them."

That is the way in which most of us finally settle our moral problems. We do not go on stiffening up our guards against temptations in the form of the things we ought not to do, fighting them off and keeping them at bay for a lifetime. We find that what was once a temptation ceases to tempt us any longer because it gets in the way of ends which we have concluded matter more to us. We experience what the famous old Scotch preacher called "the expulsive power of a new affection." Thereafter, a certain narrowness in our choices and our interests is accepted as being the fair price we shall have to pay for some skill or knowledge or excellence we most desire. We do not quarrel with the price, because we know that it is just and is in some rough manner the measure of the actual worth of that which we seek. We should distrust it if it were had too cheaply and without price. The right to own anything, said Ruskin, is dependent upon the willingness to pay

a fair price for it. We wish to have that right, and to have it in our own right. We do not wish to be moral paupers.

This, then, is the initial problem, and the subsequent truth of the Christian doctrine of the narrow way. That doctrine is open to misinterpretation, that way is open to misconstruction. But if one will cling to the idea that, just because the mind and heart of the Christian are rightly set on what is "wide," one will soberly accept, as its normal approach, the way which is "strait."

CHAPTER X

THE UPHILL WAY

TOWARD THE END OF THE "BOOK OF PSALMS" there are fifteen short Psalms (120-134 inclusive) grouped together as "songs of degrees" or "songs of ascent." They were intended for the use of pilgrims going to Jerusalem for one or another of the high feasts. Jerusalem itself, crowning the central ridge of Palestine, is spoken of in the most familiar of these Psalms, the 122nd, as a city "whither the tribes go up."

The phrase is, as we have already said of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem at the end of his ministry, wholly faithful to the physical fact. It is also true to the cultural fact. In England one always talks about "going up to London," or "going up to Oxford or Cambridge." London and Oxford and Cambridge are in low-lying land—the first two in the Thames Valley, the third in the flat Fen country. As a matter of altitude one usually has to go down to them from some higher level. Nevertheless, mentally one "goes up" to them. So, also, of points of the compass, even though one should start from Edinburgh and travel southward, one would still be "going up to London." For, in the mind, one can only "go up" to that for which such cities stand. Therefore, it is good religion to say that the pilgrim had to "go up" to Jerusalem.

But there was, also, in that case geographical warrant for the fact. For wherever the traveler started he had to climb. Jerusalem, after the reformation implied in the *Book of Deuteronomy*, had become the only place where the Jew might sacrifice. It was the site of the central sanctuary, the temple. And as the center and sole scene for the sacrificial worship of the temple, it had succeeded to a previous Canaanite "high place."

It is now almost a commonplace to comment on the prominence of the mountains and the high hills as the places where many of the most signal happenings of the Bible took place. Yet there they are—they cannot be deleted from the record: the mountain where the Law was given, the mountain on which Moses died, Carmel with its prophets, the mount of the Temptation, the mount of the Beatitudes, the mount of Transfiguration, the mount of the Crucifixion. And always, as a center of reference, Mount Zion, the mountain of God.

The habit of mind of a man or a people is indicated by the words in most frequent use. Mountains are mentioned about five hundred times in the Bible. They were part of the mental fabric and the daily speech of the men who wrote the Bible. Mountains were what they saw when they looked out and around upon their world. The stories which cluster around those sights were, to use Ruskin's chapter titles, stories both of "Mountain Gloom" and of "Mountain Glory."

In this identification of human life, in its times of crisis and at its best, with some one mountain or another, the writers of the Bible were trusting one of

the deepest and most instinctive promptings of the human mind. In his scholarly Gifford Lectures on *Symbolism and Belief* Edwyn Bevan has stressed in an opening chapter the dependence of every vital faith upon symbols which serve to suggest that which cannot be defined or even faithfully described. A symbol is effectively suggestive only as it makes use of familiar facts in our commonplace experience. He then goes on to list the symbols which all religions have employed: light, fire, wind, the passage of time. He prefaces his discussion of the nature and the intimations of these symbols by two long chapters on "Height." Of all the symbols which religion has ever used this is, he says, apparently the most spontaneous and perhaps the most suggestive. The sky overhead is the home of the gods. The realm of the spirit is the kingdom of the heavens. And mountain tops are the nearest approach we in this world have to the heavens overhead.

Bevan tries to analyze, to rationalize, the sources and the intimations of this symbol of height. We instinctively associate "higher" with "better"; height gives one who has it an advantage over those beneath him and thus suggests power or authority; an altitude gives wide views of things. As for the heavens above, they are there in contrast to the earth below and thus suggest that "otherness" which the idea of God and religion requires. It was from the heavens, also, that man first learned the lesson of the orderliness of nature and thus formulated his idea of law.

Yet when he has said all this, Dr. Bevan admits that

the subject cannot be reduced to prose analysis. Of the religious symbolism which is derived from the sky and the mountain tops and the whole idea of height he says, variously; that we have here

> . . . a feeling of appropriateness which outruns intellectual understanding. It seemed somehow appropriate to primitive man to think of the chief Being as very high, as living up there in the sky. . . .
>
> Possibly the awe which a man feels in looking up a huge mountain wall is not based on any explicable ground, but is something primary and unanalysable. . . .
>
> The unknown world at the top of the mountains and the inaccessible sky-world were all one world up there in which the gods dwelt, or the Chief Being dwelt. The mountain was thought of as a kind of staircase leading thither. This gave to the idea of height, even as applied to the inaccessible sky, the idea of something which it would be a supreme attainment for man to reach. . . .
>
> Between men and virtue—says Hesiod—"the track is long and steep and upwards, rough at the outset, though when a man has arrived at the summit, then it becomes easy." This figure no doubt describes a quality in moral goodness which men have instinctively felt everywhere. It is a movement of the will against gravity; . . . to follow the good impulses has seemed like going uphill, and to follow the evil ones like going downhill.
>
> To climb a mountain is a continued achievement of will against gravity, and at the same time the range of vision increases with altitude. There is something in intellectual, artistic, moral, spiritual achievement which gives a feeling that man instinctively recognizes as analogous.[1]

[1] Edwyn Bevan, *Symbolism and Belief* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1938), pp. 58 ff.

These reflections are prompted mainly by passages in the Greek and Roman classics, but they are just as true of the Bible. The heavens and the mountains are always there on its pages. The eye of the author is always raised: "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills" (*Ps. 121:1*).

Let us go on to a passage in the prophecy of *Isaiah* which introduces into this symbolism, from the mountains which are round about, a further idea. The mountain top was usually regarded, when used as a figure of speech, as a point of arrival. Not many men reach the summit. Indeed, there may be summits which no man has ever reached. Everest still remains to be climbed. So it is with that high verse in the Sermon on the Mount, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (*Matt. 5:48*). Such altitudes are not soon or easily attained. These ultimate summits are goals; the kingdom of the heavens to which they rise must be considered as the realm of final ends.

To return to the verse from *Isaiah*, the prophet speaking in God's name says, "I will make all my mountains a way, and my highways shall be exalted" (*Is. 49:11*). That verse would seem to strain the symbol, or to pervert it. Through roads avoid mountain country if they can. If man must make a road through a mountainous country, he builds his roads at the lowest possible point in the valleys between summits on either side. These roads we know as the great historic "passes"; the Grimsel, the Furka, the St. Gothard, the

Brenner in the Alps; Kirkstone and Dunmail Raise in the Lake District; Deadman's and the Donner in the Rockies.

Meanwhile, in Whymper's *Scrambles among the Alps*, there is an account of an ascent of the Matterhorn from the north side of the mountain, and then of a descent on the south side. The summit of the Matterhorn thus became, for the first time in history, a pass between Switzerland and Italy. Plainly the author of *Isaiah 49:11* had something of this bold idea in mind. The highways were not to be kept as low as possible; they were to be "exalted." The mountains themselves, even their summits, were to become a "way."

It may well be that with something of the road-builder's enthusiasm the writer of that passage looked up at the mountains round about Jerusalem and pictured there roads which, so far from avoiding the heights, sought them out and accepted them. He may have had in mind merely what we have come to know as a "sky-line drive" and the zest which is had from traveling over such a road. Or he may have taken prophetic satisfaction in the prospect of a road which was to cross the mountains, as of an aspiration realized.

The idea of the mountain as a highway may have, however, another implicit meaning which we need today. For example, when the first Everest expedition set out, it was denied direct access to the Himalayas from northern India because the southern boundary of the principality of Nepal which intervened was closed to foreigners. The expedition could not go straight

from India to Everest and the adjoining peaks. It had to go around three sides of a square: up into Tibet, across the Tibetan plateau, and then southward to the mountain. In the course of the journey across Tibet the party made occasional side trips to the lower-lying peaks to the east of Everest, and to the passes between the peaks. They found that the Tibetan passes were open and unguarded; had they wished to do so they could have gone down into Nepal from the north without let or hindrance.

Tolstoi once said that the most important thing in life is for man to unite with man. We all agree. But direct access to your fellow human beings is by no means always easy, is indeed often very difficult. So far as the wider world is concerned the situation has disimproved beyond all belief in the last forty years. Some of you can remember the days when, save into the most remote places, you could travel where you wished without a passport. Even when passports were issued they were not hard to get. Now all passports have been recalled and canceled. You cannot get, today, a passport for anything like general travel; and if your government should issue you a passport, it is an open question whether you can get it visaed for the lands you may wish to visit. Free travel and direct access is going to be problematical for many years to come.

The political and military fact is merely a transcript of cultural and spiritual facts. The minds of other peoples are not as open to us as once they were. They have posted guards along their borders to challenge the

alien. We may have repudiated "isolationism" at the polls, but it is by no means exorcised from our minds. Even if we could rid ourselves of this theoretically outmoded point of view, we cannot be sure that others have done so. It may no longer be true that "East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet," but these two historic areas of human experience understand each other less well than they have for many many years. And within "Christendom" the best will in the world is met with sullen hostilities and resentments and fears. You may have seen those trainloads of German prisoners going from a transport to some place of detention, or trucks full of prisoners being used to harvest some local crop. The sullenness of their faces is unbroken by a single smile. One realizes how hard it is going to be in future years to cross the border of such minds.

Indeed, direct access to their minds is now so difficult that one is sometimes tempted to despair of access to such persons. How can you effectively forgive a man who has not the least desire to be forgiven? How can you break down the barrier of hatred within which he has entrenched himself, even if you have put away hatred from your heart? These problems will baffle the wit of the wisest internationalist during the years of reconstruction which are ahead.

It is here that the metaphor of the highway over the mountains may give us some initial help. If Alpine climbers used the top of the Matterhorn as a pass between Switzerland and Italy, may it not be that the

thought of God can become such a pass in our time? For if that thought is held by any two minds it becomes a bond between them, a means of mutual understanding. Even if one only of the two aspires to that thought and holds to it, it will give him a patient generosity which he will lack if he relies only upon his native human wit.

Dr. Koussevitzky proposed not long since that when the peacemakers assemble they should listen for a while, before each of their sessions, to a symphony orchestra playing great music: Bach or Haydn or Mozart. The suggestion is by no means as wild as it may sound. Music is by common consent our most universal language. Its accepted classics in the Western world, unless one's mind is thoroughly vitiated by politics (as in the case of the Nazi prohibition of Mendelssohn in Germany, because he was a Jew), are still an international currency recognized and valid in every land. Not only so, but in the purest music there is a high impersonal quality which goes beyond personal idiosyncrasies. It forbids the finiteness of private passions. It transcends differences and blends both players and hearers into a community with a single experience. Dr. Koussevitzky's proposal was not ecclesiastical or theological in any formal sense of the word; one may hazard the guess that it is essentially religious.

How are we to begin thinking of Germans and Japanese today, then of Italians and Greeks and Belgians and French; how even of our allies in Russia! In the former cases minds are closed against us; in the

latter cases, also, friction is already apparent. The more we argue, whatever working agreements we reach, the more reservations we cherish in our own minds. We say, "Yes . . . but . . ." These smoldering misunderstandings and resentments will linger on, to flare up at some later time. Then is the time to turn our minds from the thought of our fellow men to the thought of God. There plainly are among our enemies men of criminal mind who have brought untold misery upon this generation. How far their criminality is a matter of actual mental disease and how far a matter of self-conscious and deliberate evil is a riddle which is hard to read. Any human vengeance we may take on them will perhaps satisfy for the moment our sense of the fitness of things, but the moral mystery which they represent is hidden with God, whose vengeance and whose pity are the ultimate court of appeal.

During the last war Dr. Hensley Henson said, "The Christian preacher ought to strive so to preach that, in the retrospect of a later time, he shall be able to recall his words without shame. For the War will not last forever. Sooner or later peace will return. . . . His influence for good will not be helped if his people have associated him with the very violences of thought and speech of which they themselves are growing ashamed." A quarter of a century later Dr. Henson, finding himself and his church and his country in another war, could only add, "What I thought in 1915, I still think in 1941."

Dr. Henson would agree that it is the duty of the

Christian to try to see the issues of any given passing hour *sub specie aeternitatis*, i.e., in their eternal aspect. This is a high endeavor and is ultimately beyond the finite powers of any one of us. Yet the more we found our judgments upon what we believe to be "eternal" verities and principles, the more enduring they are likely to be. Even our poor approximations to such judgments will save them from the shortsightedness of passing passions and from the disappointments born of too shrewd ventures at good will. "Seest thou these great buildings? there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down. . . . Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away" (*Mark 13:2, 31*).

It is very easy, in these days, to indict whole nations. In moments when we are invaded by such tempers we shall do well to read the last verse of the *Book of Jonah* —one of the most sobering and tender passages in all the Bible: "And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?" (*Jonah 4:11*) The utter pity of the lot of all such helpless persons does not go untended by the mercy of God. It was a hard, even a bitter lesson that Jonah had to learn, but in the end he began to see his time *sub specie aeternitatis*.

There is a fine passage in the Old Testament in which the adversaries of Israel said, "Their gods are gods of the hills; therefore they were stronger than we; but let us fight against them on the plain, and

surely we shall be stronger than they" (*I Kings 20:23*). The words invite metaphorical use. If we are lured down to lower levels of expediency in the struggle of life, we imperil our cause. So long as our ideals and our standards are those of the hills our cause may hope to prevail.

Something of this sort, then, is implied in that fine old verse about all the mountains being a highway. The thought of God is a high pass by which religious persons will always try to find a way of entry into lives otherwise closed against them. St. Augustine said it once for all in one of the most memorable passages of the *Confessions*: "Blessed is he who loves Thee, and his friend in Thee, and his enemy for Thee. For he alone loses no one dear to him, to whom all are dear in Him Who never can be lost."

CHAPTER XI

THE UNEQUAL WAY

IT HAS BEEN SAID THAT OF ALL THE WORDS OF JESUS, as recorded in the Gospels, none is harder to believe than his statement, "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father" (*Matt. 10:29*).

Modern science finds it hard to accept this saying. Nature seems jealous for the species but careless of the single creature. Years ago Thomas Huxley wrote to Charles Kingsley, "I cannot see one jot or tittle of evidence that the great unknown underlying the phenomena of the universe stands to us in the relation of a Father—loves us and cares for us as Christianity asserts."

We are again living through one of those periods in history when it is by no means easy to defend the doctrine of the worth of the individual. Human lives have been poured out like water spilled upon the ground. Nothing seems so cheap as a man.

Nevertheless, this confidence that every single soul is known to God and dear to God remains an article of the Christian faith, problematical as it may be for science and improbable as contemporary history may seem to make it. An Oxford "Greats" don, not a theologian (F. H. Bradley), says, "It is not merely one of

the doctrines of religion, it is the central doctrine of religion, upon which all religious exercise rests, that God knows and cares for each one of us individually, that he knows Jane Smith by name, and what she earns a week, and how much she spends on the care of her poor old paralyzed mother." We might add that in its secular equivalent, this is also the faith upon which democracy is founded. In this respect, however, both Christianity and democracy are still professions of faith rather than plain inferences from the facts. We have yet to make their dual faith fully good.

On the other hand, there are not wanting champions and vindicators of this faith. The East End of London still lives in the afterglow of the example of Samuel Barnett, who was for a time vicar of St. Jude's, Whitechapel, then warden of Toynbee Hall. In her biography of her husband Mrs. Barnett says that he had observed that people who came down to Toynbee Hall for brief visits from the West End with large blueprint plans for the redemption of his dreary slums did little or no good. The only permanent good which was done in the East End was done by persons "who were willing to take time and trouble with individuals." There is a remembrance and echo of the ministry of Jesus in those words, for Jesus was patently one who took time and trouble with individuals. His faith in the worth of the fallen sparrow never lacked the confirmation given it by his work with men.

Meanwhile, the doctrine of the value of every single human being is not an innovation in the Gospels. Jesus

may have given it its classical statement; he did not "invent" it. The doctrine emerges first and most clearly in the eighteenth and thirty-third chapters of the prophecy of *Ezekiel*.

The religion of Israel was, at the first, based upon a confidence that Israel was God's chosen people. It was the corporate life of Israel that mattered most, not the fortunes of the single Israelite. The days of man, said the Wisdom writer, are numbered, but the days of Israel are innumerable. The single individual was apparently content for centuries with this assurance. He might pass away, but his people would endure. It was a primitive "social gospel" in which he believed, not a gospel for the individual.

With the return from exile the mind of the Jew turned inward; his piety became more personal and intimate. The misfortunes of the people as a whole turned his mind to the fortunes of the single believer. The individualistic piety of Pharisaism, which was to emerge in due time, furnished, therefore, the background for Jesus' concern for the individual and confidence in his worth.

The classical passage presupposed by the Christian doctrine, which was a reversal and revision of the earlier emphasis upon the worth of Israel as a whole, is that in *Ezekiel 18:25 ff.* (paralleled in *Ezekiel 33:17 ff.*):

> Yet ye say, The way of the Lord is not equal. Hear now, O house of Israel; Is not my way equal: are not your ways unequal?

When a righteous man turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and dieth in them; for his iniquity that he hath done shall he die.

Again, when the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive. . . .

Yet saith the house of Israel, The way of the Lord is not equal. O house of Israel, are not my ways equal? are not your ways unequal?

The word "equal" in this connection would seem to suggest the analogy of a scales which balances with an even beam. This usage is, however, listed in the dictionary as archaic, and modern translations state the case in a more familiar vernacular. Moffatt translates the passage,

And yet you complain that the Lord is not acting fairly! Listen, O Israel; my methods not fair! Is it not rather your methods that are not fair?

Ezekiel's dogmatic suggestion that God is always "fair" has not sufficed to quiet the uneasiness and smoldering human resentment to which he addressed himself. The feeling that life and the world have not been fair to millions upon millions of suffering men and women and children in the modern world is very widespread. One can understand the bewilderment and despair of all those who have been the victims of brutal anti-Semitism in Europe. The ghettos of Europe have not deserved the concentration camps, the gas chambers, the incinerators, and the vast common graves

in which they have come to their end. The modern world has been cruelly unfair to the Jew.

So, in lesser degree, one can understand that the present generation of youth in America and England, which was born into, or just after, the First World War and has now had to fight the second war, must feel that life and the times have not been fair to it. It is this residual uneasy suspicion of some prior responsibility which we imperfectly discharged that makes those of us who are older reluctant to criticize youth today. Had we been better and wiser we might have saved them this; we were not and we did not. We can understand their pacifism, their isolationism, even though we have not been able to proffer them exemption from these times. The lines have not fallen to them in pleasant places, and no patriotic rhetoric of ours can quiet their deep resentment, however bravely they may have done their duty.

Of course what we face here is the dark and ancient mystery which we know as "the problem of evil." After hearing a sermon on the *Book of Job* in the Harvard Chapel some years ago President Lowell said, "Yes, I suppose that the undeserved suffering of one innocent man is the most acute statement of the problem of evil that we know." Here is one of the reasons why we cannot turn away soon and easily from the sight of the cross and the story of the crucifixion. The problem was never stated more acutely than on Golgotha. It is a sound instinct which has prompted Christians ever since to bring to the foot of that cross the heavy and

the weary weight of the ever increasing burden of this mystery.

The passage from *Ezekiel* which we have quoted would seem primarily to concern what we might call the spiritual fortunes of the individual. It has to do with the attitude of a man toward God, and his resultant inward peace or discord. In another of his letters to Kingsley, Thomas Huxley says, "The ledger of the Almighty is strictly kept, and every one has the balance of his operations paid over to him at the end of every minute of his existence."

One does not question the truth of Ezekiel's statement or that of his modern commentator, if it be understood that their words concern the spiritual disposition and thus the moral character of the individual. We get into difficulties with the doctrine of the fairness of God in his dealings with us only when we go on to suppose that a good man must automatically also be healthy, rich, happy, and long-lived. Any such supposition presupposes some kind of bank of exchange in the universe at which a currency essentially spiritual in its nature can be exchanged for a cash equivalent of a material kind. The conviction that there is, or ought to be, some such place of exchange is very old, and still survives stubbornly. It is, indeed, to be found in many parts of the Old Testament—the first Psalm for example. So again we read, "I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread" (*Ps. 37:25*). According to Eliphaz the Temanite (*Job 15:23*) it is the wicked

man who has to search for bread. One can only say in all candor that Eliphaz and the Psalmist must have lived in a very exceptional society. For, in so far as we can appraise these matters, our time has seen the righteous man forsaken and his children starving. They are only too tragically familiar today in Europe and Asia.

It was, of course, to this theory of the bank where righteousness could be exchanged for prosperity that Job laid siege. The conventional doctrine that in any one human life goodness can be relied upon to pay cash dividends in the currency of this earth was not borne out by his experience. Therefore, at the risk of heresy, Job had to trust the testimony of his own conscience against the dogma. There is, thus, within the covers of the Bible confessed perplexity on this whole matter. The Bible is of two minds. It seems at first to have had the idea, native to us all, that worldly circumstance is always equated with inward disposition and character; it was confronted with the plain fact that apparently this is not so, and revised its thinking accordingly.

If Huxley found it hard to believe that God cares for the fallen sparrow, the plain man finds it hard to believe, in the terms which first occur to him, that the account books of history and society are so strictly kept that every man gets a fair deal, his private account balancing at every moment of the day.

Prayer, for example, is a transaction which presupposes some response. It is something more than a

pious soliloquy. Presumably it should have its consequences. With many of us, save in our more reflective hours, prayer seeks an answer in the terms of "things." When we fail to get the "things" for which we pray, we say, as a parishoner once said in bitter disappointment, "I prayed in all good faith believing I should get what I asked for, and I did not. Therefore, either one of two things is true; either there is no God, or else, if there is a God, he does not hear and answer prayer." We are like the disappointed and discredited priests of Baal, our God is asleep or on a journey.

It was Job himself who was invaded by a doubt as to whether or not this is, and should be, the truth of prayer. There is a revealing verse in his long process of self-criticism which betrays this doubt: "If I had called, and he had answered me; yet would I not believe that he had hearkened unto my voice" (*Job 9:16*). It is as though he came to the conclusion that he would not like to think that all his petitions could be answered and would be answered to the letter. He seems almost dismayed at the prospect that this might be so, as though he were afraid of the magical power which such a situation would vest in him. Indeed, it has always been the primitive magician rather than the mature saint who has proposed to exercise this kind of coercive control over God, and it has been rightly pointed out that, if such control exists, it is the magician himself who is the god, not the forces which he thinks he has at his beck and call.

There is in the *Book of Ecclesiastes* (*5:20*) a verse

which says, "God answereth him in the joy of his heart." The Preacher was probably talking in the first instance about the earthly and creature contentment of a normally happy man. But his words are capable of a further meaning. The heart—and this meant the mind as well—is the place where God answers prayer, and the one way above all others in which he answers. There may be other answers. Who knows! The familiar instances of answered prayer may be matched by other and perhaps even more numerous instances of unanswered prayer. It is impossible to divide between them. But plainly the first and most reliable answer to prayer is the inward assurance that one is at peace with God. The assurance that one is thus at peace enables one to bear with fortitude and patience countless creature sufferings even to the point of naked peril. The discipline of prayer looks to what à Kempis calls "the joy of a good conscience"; the major answer to prayer is the reassurance of joy in one's own heart.

Is there, then, no connection between the two worlds which we call spiritual and material, no commerce between them? Does the common-sense idea of some kind of reliable justice in life and the world break down in face of the facts? Must we confine the transactions of religion to what might be called some realm of disembodied spirits?

We need not think so. But we can hazard only a guess as to the truth of the facts. Plainly no single man lives and dies to himself. We are woven into a web of life which involves us with countless lives

around us. A recent prayer says, "Grant unto us, O God, the heart to feel and the mind to know that mankind's every sin is our sin." This is a mature, as it is also a modern, sentiment; it is the heart of what we may call a truly social gospel. Yet it would be asking much of a humble peasant in an occupied country to expect him in the hour of his mortal peril to take upon himself the guilt of the whole world at the moment of his martyrdom.

What one can say is this, that over a long period of years any given, considerable human society does seem to discover some reliable connection between its dominant tempers and its historical fortunes. Just as we say a people gets about the kind of government it deserves, so we may go on to say that in the long run a nation or a state seems to get something like its deserts. We Americans have been proverbially a wasteful people. Denuding our soil may not have seemed at a given moment a breach of the moral law, but after a century of ruthlessness we are now paying for the sum of those acts in the terms of barren gullies and hopeless dust bowls. The expansion of the British Empire may have seemed from the seventeenth well into the nineteenth century the fulfillment of a God-given mission, but many a sober Englishman now realizes to the bitter full the moral recoil upon his little island of the less justifiable phases of that imperialism. It is sobering, almost terrifying, to think of the penalties which Nazi Germany has invited upon herself for years to come: fear, suspicion, distrust from

all the nations round. In this sense of the word one can say that there is a certain long-term justice at work in the ledgers of history. In the operations of this justice many generations are involved; neither credit nor blame can be isolated and attached to a single generation, much less to any single individual.

So, likewise, of the world-wide contemporary history in which many societies are involved; the doctrine of "One World" is no longer a poetic romance; it is sober prose. Poverty and misery in one country must eventually affect prosperity in another country. The germs of disease and the smoldering spirit of revolution do not respect national boundaries. If the warp of the web of life runs through many centuries, the woof of our interdependence girdles the globe. No one seriously doubts this any longer.

When, therefore, the single human being cries out in his perplexity and distress, "It isn't fair, why should this befall me?" the first answer is, "No, in the sense in which you use these words life is not fair. Your suffering is not a direct penalty for some private sin. You may have tried to live a good life and may well have succeeded. But you cannot disentangle your life from that of your forefathers and of all your contemporaries. You seem to think that your individual life is a thing apart. It is not. It is woven into the texture of history and society, so that both the remote past and the world-wide present impinge upon you to make the circumstances of your life what they are. The web of nature and history and society involves you in processes

which are not of your personal devising, but from which you cannot extricate yourself. It will not seem fair to you at first that this is so, but it may begin to seem fair to you if you will realize the full measure of the truth that no man liveth and dieth to himself in these matters of human and creature circumstance."

The truth of the equal ways of God is written into St. Paul's majestic celebration of the body and the members (*I Cor. 12*), in which all members suffer when one member suffers, and all members rejoice when one member is honored. If there seems to be loss in such a truth, so also there is gain. The profit, which we too often forget, must be set against the loss, in defense of the equal ways of God. It is not "fair"—it is merely an accident of geography—that our American cities are still intact in a world where so many cities are little more than smoldering ruins. There is profit as well as loss in the web of life. The "fairness of history" is a long-range, world-wide matter. One who slowly grows up to this view of his life in history and society does not question the rough yet reliable justice of things, or charge the moral order with unfairness. The doctrine of membership in the body of our total humanity is the answer to our first instinctive doubt of the fairness of God in his provision for the earthly life of his children.

CHAPTER XII

THE UNKNOWN WAY

WE HAVE SAID THAT THE WORD "WAY" MEANS, IN both the Old Testament and the New Testament, "a well trodden path." But the Bible has much to say of pathless reaches of life. The wanderings in the desert of Sinai lingered on in the minds of the biblical writer, as a hard unforgotten fact and as a symbol of certain recurring stretches of human experience. "He causeth them to wander in a wilderness, where there is no way" (*Job 12:24*). The theory of the "way" proffers us well trodden paths; the practice often opens trackless areas before us. What are we to make of this seeming contradiction between theory and practice?

Perhaps the first thing to be said is that life's well trodden paths are by no means self-explanatory. "There be three things which are too wonderful for me, yea four which I know not: the way of an eagle in the air, the way of a serpent upon a rock; the way of a ship in the midst of the sea; and the way of a man with a maid" (*Prov. 30:18, 19*). Here are four commonplace facts; yet we understand none of them fully. The problem becomes more mysterious when it is stated in the first person rather than the third person. "How can a man understand his own way?" (*Prov. 20:24*)

Carlyle felt the weight of this question. He states it in an early chapter of *Sartor Resartus.*

> With men of a speculative turn there come seasons, meditative, sweet, yet awful hours, when in wonder and fear you ask yourself that unanswerable question: Who am *I*; the thing that can say *"I"*? The world, with its loud traffickings, retires into the distance . . . and you are alone with the Universe.
>
> Who am I; what is this ME? A voice, a motion, an Appearance;—some embodied, visualized Idea in the Eternal Mind? . . . This Dreaming, this Somnambulism is what on Earth we call Life; wherein most indeed undoubtingly wander, as if they knew right hand from left; yet they only are wise who know that they know nothing. . . . But whence?—O Heaven whither? Sense knows not; Faith knows not; only that it is through Mystery to Mystery, from God and to God.

Our occasional experience of a world in which there is no way serves to remind us that both life and the world are ultimately mysterious. This is as true of the well beaten path, though its hard surface and its plain direction may disguise the truth, as it is of the trackless reaches of our world. Meanwhile, the desert left its mark on the mind of the Jew, and in the desert the wind-blown sand effaces every track made upon its surface. The desert returns to its own inscrutable self.

We have here one of the occasions for the loss of religion in our time. Modern science has pushed back the borders of our knowledge so rapidly into what was not long ago the areas of our ignorance that, for the moment and in the first flush of these victories, we have come to think of our knowledge as a finished thing. We have lost the realization that, at the best,

we have only "Aspects of the Infinite Mystery." The loss of the felt need to worship, and thus the desire to worship, is part of the intellectual experience through which we have been passing. Coleridge says that philosophy begins in wonder and ends in wonder, and all the interspaces are filled with admiration. The same might be said of religion; it begins and ends in a great wonder, and its interspaces are filled with reverence. The unknown and untried way serves therefore to restore to us this lost sense of the ultimate mysteriousness of human life.

There is another aspect of this experience of the trackless areas of life. They may be deceptive. Ruskin, in his chapters on the mountains, says in bitter jest that when one climbs the highest Alp one finds the summit strewn with egg shells and chicken bones. That untidy sight destroys in an instant the sense of pioneering achievement which the late-comer has.

Life has for every one of us its elements of novelty. There is for each man a first time when he passes through one of the major experiences of life. Nothing can take away from him at such a time the sense of venturing into an untried and uncharted world. Probably nothing should be allowed to take it away. There was a moment in their colloquy when Job's friends asked him, "Art thou the first man that was born?" They were trying to bludgeon him into consent to the conventions by seeming to challenge the firsthand quality of his distress. Job should have answered, "Yes, for the purposes of my own inner struggle, I am to all

intents the first man who was ever born." Just as he said, "Till I die I will not remove mine integrity," so he might have said, "I will stand by the originality of my life and lot."

Nevertheless, it is true that it is precisely these experiences which, as they first come to us, seem most distinctively and uniquely our own that prove in the end to be also the most universally human. By general consent of the wisdom of the world every man is great at three moments in his life: the moment of his birth, the moment of his marriage, and the moment of his death. Each of these moments has its intense and intimate individuality; yet each of these moments lets the human being into the life of "all sorts of conditions of men."

What does the word "common" mean to you? To many persons it is a word of little worth, meaning at the most "commonplace," a word of low denomination. Not so, however, with a poet like Wordsworth, for whom this was one of the highest and most precious words in our speech. When he speaks of "the common heart of man" he is speaking of what was to him one of our treasure houses.

Therefore, when we come to what may be, now for one of us and now for another, an untried way in a trackless world, we shall not have understood its final meanings until we realize that we may well have happened unawares upon one of the great common roads of life. We have to keep our initial sense of the uniqueness of private experience at the same time

that we eventually marry it to an awareness of a universal experience. The person who wants a "different marriage service" because his love is unlike that of anyone who ever went before; the person who wants a different funeral service for someone loved and now lost, because there has never been any sorrow like unto his sorrow—these persons are wrong. They are missing or shirking the final truth of their joy and their sorrow. Every minister of religion is grateful to the occasional parishioner who sees deeper into the truth of his experience, and says, "Use the words that are always used for everybody." Your uniqueness will finally lose its meaning unless it is reinterpreted in the terms of universality.

Would we dare to say this of Jesus? It has been much the fashion in recent years to insist upon "the uniqueness of Jesus," in the effort to defend his divinity at the cost of his "mere" humanity. The faith of Russian Christians and the theology of the Russian Church grasp, as other systems have often failed to do, the truth of the doctrine of the Incarnation. Turgenev says,

> I saw myself, a youth, almost a boy, in a low-pitched wooden church. The slim wax candles gleamed, spots of red, before the old pictures of the saints. There stood before me many people, all fair-haired peasant heads. From time to time they began swaying, falling, rising again, like the ripe ears of wheat when the wind in summer passes over them. All at once a man came up from behind and stood beside me. I did not turn towards him, but I felt that the man was Christ. Emotion,

curiosity, awe overmastered me. I made an effort and looked at my neighbour. A face like everyone's, a face like all men's faces. The eyes looked a little upward, quietly and intently; the lips closed, not compressed; the upper lip as it were resting on the other; a small beard parted in two; the hands folded and still; and the clothes on him like everyone's.

"What sort of Christ is this," I thought. "Such an ordinary, ordinary man. It cannot be." I turned away, but I had hardly turned my eyes from this ordinary man when I felt again that it was really none other than Christ standing beside me. Suddenly my heart sank and I came to myself. Only then I realized that just such a face is the face of Christ—a face like all men's faces.

In ascribing to Christ just such a "commonness" Turgenev intended to dignify rather than to disparage his subject. To the degree that Christ was "ordinary" he was by virtue of that very fact universal, "made in all things like unto his brethren."

Religion, when it is true to itself, is always orthodox, while theology is, and ought always to be, in process of becoming heretical. The basic constant experiences of the religious life—an awareness of mystery, an instinctive desire to worship, a sense of personal inadequacy, a feeling of dependence—these are constant century after century. The superficial changes which go on in society, in what we call "civilization," affect them little or not at all. The saints, as St. Louis said, not merely "come from the same country and speak the same language," they are contemporaries; centuries do not separate them. On the other hand the rational interpretation of their experiences, their sober, reflective, second

thoughts change with our changing understanding of the world of nature around us and of our own human nature. The initial facts are uniform, our analysis of the facts varies and progresses with our better understanding of our world and of ourselves. Religion cannot ignore the changes at the surface of our life, but at the same time it may never neglect the constant subsoil of human life in which our most intimate experiences are rooted and by which they are nourished. This is the twentieth century. Its manners and methods and apparatus are "modern." Yet these contemporary aspects of our life can never outmode the *Book of Job*, or the Passion of Christ, or the lyric hymn to charity in St. Paul's Epistle. Our discovery of any one of these realities often comes as a venture into what is for any one of us an untried way. Yet the adventure, if it be a genuine insight, gives place to the discovery that in these elemental matters we are, as Turgenev said of Christ, "such ordinary, ordinary men." This discovery is the birth in us of that true "catholicity" which the very idea of religion requires. In the end the Christian gives up the immature desire to be "unique," and hungers to be, in the fullest sense of the word, "common." A mature Christian will accept humbly and gladly the universality of his experience.

Yet when we have said all this, we have to admit that for our society as a whole there are in history untried and untrodden ways on which we have to venture forth. When the children of Israel were about to cross the Jordan, Joshua said to the people, "Ye have not

passed this way heretofore." They were not, it is true, going into a virgin land. Men had been there before. But no people with their faith had ever possessed that land before. It was the faith of Israel which was to give all its enduring meanings to the land of Palestine, not that of their pagan predecessors.

In this sense of the word our lot is like theirs. In 1917 John Morley, then in retirement from public life, published his *Recollections*. He prefaced his memoirs by saying, "The world is travelling under formidable omens into a new era, very unlike the times in which my lot was cast." He foresaw only too clearly what his successors have only slowly come to realize, the drastic nature of the changes which were ushered in by the First World War. That war and the war which has followed it are something more than a matter of squaring the petty cash accounts of a world that is to go straight on in its undeviating course; they are a balancing of the ledgers of many years—roughly the last four hundred years of nationalism, imperialism, capitalism, and industrialism. It has been hard for us to grasp this fact and still harder to accept it, yet most of us now know that it is a fact. Only the die-hards still hope to "return to normalcy." The pattern of the future will be unlike that of the past. So far as the fabric and structure of society are concerned, even within the boundaries of what we have conveniently, and perhaps prematurely, called "Christendom," we are faced with an unknown world; we "have not passed this way heretofore."

Prophets have foreseen this situation for many years, though their words have fallen on deaf ears. More than a generation ago Tolstoi quoted his revolutionary predecessor, Alexander Herzen:

> What will there be beyond the walls of the world we leave behind? Terror seizes us—the void, expanse, freedom. . . . How can we go without knowing whither? How can we lose without seeing any acquisition? If Columbus had reflected thus he would never have weighed anchor. It is madness to sail the sea without knowing the way, to sail the sea no one has ever traversed before—to make for a country the existence of which is a question. But with this madness he discovered a new world. Of course, if nations could move from one furnished apartment to another it would be easier; but, unfortunately, there is no one to arrange the new quarters. In the future it is worse than on the sea—there is nothing; it will be what circumstances and men make of it.

One might put over against these words a story which has come to us from the Labrador. When Dr. Grenfell went to that coast, much of it was uncharted in detail. His work with the fishermen took him in and out of harbors where there were no guides to navigation. It is said that on such occasions it was his custom to crawl out onto the bowsprit of his little steamer, the *Strathcona*, lie down and lash himself in place, then peer into the water as the ship made her way cautiously forward, sighting rocks and reefs as they showed up in the water just ahead and beneath him, and shouting orders to the helmsman in the wheelhouse behind and above him. Grenfell was a good sailor with an uncanny sense for the sea. He would not

be deterred in his work by the lack of a chart. He brought his own seamanship to meet and match the unknown coast line. He was ready, when occasion required, "to sail the sea without knowing the way."

Something of the same sort should be true of the religious life. We may lack a chart for the history of the future. We are not, however, without a sense of direction and without a method. The Christian has always believed that Jesus is "the way." If the words mean anything other than pleasantly pious rhetoric, they mean that we have from our Lord and Master a manner of life and an advance method for meeting unknown and untried situations. We must have a love that never fails, we must forgive, we must hope, and we must trust in God. If hatred and resentment and cynical despair conquer us, we have lost our way. Jesus himself told his disciples facing an unknown and untried future that the Holy Spirit, his spirit, would tell them what to say and what to do when the time came. No one can tell what the nations of the Western world will be like twenty-five years hence, a century hence. They promise to be very unlike their present selves. There are few precedents from the past, or none, to serve as a chart of the shrouded future into which we are now moving. We who are Christians believe that the hope of better things rests above all else with those who venture into these uncharted years with their measure of the mind and heart and will of our Lord.

Finally, there is a noble verse in Job which says, "He

knoweth the way that I take." This saying is plainly set over against the unsaid but implied admission, "I do not know the way that I am taking, yet must take."

The elder theology had much to say about the "prevenience of God" and his prevenient grace. The word "prevent" has lost in our present-day English usage its original meaning. It now means "to hinder, to frustrate, to stop." These secondary meanings make nonsense of some of the most moving verses in the Bible: "The God of my mercy shall prevent me" (*Ps. 59:10*), "Let thy tender mercies speedily prevent us" (*Ps. 79:8*), "In the morning shall my prayer prevent Thee" (*Ps. 88:13*). This usage becomes more incredible in the opening words of the familiar collect which begins, "Prevent us, O Lord, in all our doings . . ." In modern English these words would seem to be a petition that God will stop us from doing anything whatsoever, and that plainly is an absurdity. To avoid this absurdity many of the modern editions of the Prayer Book have deliberately changed the word. The trouble lies, however, with the altered meanings which passing centuries attach to words. The meaning of the original word is quite clear. It means "to go before, to precede." What worth this thought gives, then, to the simple statement that in the morning our prayer shall prevent us. The prayer which precedes the day also anticipates it. We do not go unprepared into its hours; our thought and our purpose have gone before us.

So, also, of the whole idea of the prevenience of

God. The 139th Psalm is nothing but a hymn to that prevenience:

> Whither shall I go from thy spirit?
> or whither shall I flee from thy presence?
> If I ascend up into heaven thou art there:
> if I make my bed in hell, behold thou art there.
> If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell
> in the uttermost parts of the sea;
> Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy
> right hand shall hold me.

There is, apparently, one thing that the religious man may not say; he may not say, "My way is hid from the Lord." "Fears may be in the way"; we shall "wander in the wilderness in a solitary way"; we shall often have to say we "have not passed this way heretofore"; we shall find ourselves in a world where, at first sight "there is no way"; we shall ask in our distress, "Why is light given to a man whose way is hid?" one of the most inscrutable riddles in life. All these things may be true; indeed, in our time they promise to be more true than they have been for centuries past. But we may not say that our way is hid from God.

It is to such moments that the great doctrine of the prevenience of God is addressed. We may go out, not knowing whither we go, or what is in store for us. We may realize to the full that our humanity in its entirety has not passed this way before. But over against the invading sense of insecurity and perplexity we can set the ancient confidence of the Bible, "He knoweth the way that I take." This is an utterance of

faith, but in that faith and by that faith the religious man lives and dies. I may not know what lies beyond the horizon of tomorrow, but this

> I only know, I cannot drift
> Beyond his love and care.

Let us, then, hear the conclusion of the whole matter, "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass (*Ps. 37:5*).

CHAPTER XIII

"WORKS MEET FOR REPENTANCE"

THESE MEDITATIONS HAVE BEEN PLANNED FOR THE Lenten season, which the Christian supposedly devotes to self-examination. It is a time when he searches his own conscience and soberly reviews the manner of his living.

The pages which precede this final chapter have been steadily set against the tragic background of the concluding years of a second great World War. There is little ease to be had in our Zions and no occasion for complacency and self-righteousness. "Does it ever occur to you," said a friend, "that we are living in a very evil time?" Yes, in our more thoughtful moments it does occur to us, and this awareness saddens and humiliates us. Our Lenten meditations may fitly conclude, then, with two simple statements in the New Testament which no serious or sensitive Christian will attempt to deny: "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (*Rom. 3:23*); "They should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance" (*Acts 26:20*).

Robert Browning once pictured the painter Fra Lippo Lippi gazing up at a crucifix, which hung over the crowd in the streets of Florence, and saying,

Whose sad face on the cross sees only this
After the passion of a thousand years.

The face of Christ is no less sad now; perhaps only sadder at the prospect of the Christendom of our time. We may still hope, as was prophetically said, that "by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many" (*Is. 53:11*), but he is still "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief" (*Is. 53:3*).

Even when the fighting is over and the battle won, we are left with an uneasy conscience. No one of us knows what these years will have done to his conscience, or to the conscience of Christendom as a whole. Once we accepted the imperious summons to war, the logic of total war forced us to acts from which we should have revolted years ago and of which we would never have thought ourselves capable. The fact that many of these acts have been done for us who are older by those who are younger, and done far away where we cannot see their consequences, does not make us less responsible for their doing. They are our doing and remain our responsibility. The knowledge of what we were doing and the memory of what we have done will live on with us to the end of our days. Wherever and whenever and however the Last Assize be held, whether in time or in eternity, whether as the verdict of history or as the judgment of God, we shall have much to give account of.

A few have believed from the first that the Christian has only one way open to him in such a crisis—that of non-violence, either as inert passive resistance or as

aggressive spiritual resistance. They have much warrant for their conviction. In America and England their position has been respected. Most of us, however, felt in the face of the spreading cruelty of the time, a cruelty which was evil at heart and coldly calculating in its method, that this menace to all decencies must be resisted by arms. The issue between pacifism and militarism has not been as simple as once it seemed to be. The choice, whichever way we made it, was a tragic choice. There has been little or no recrimination between persons holding these differing views of Christian citizenship, for each has realized that his choice had to be, and was, a tragic choice. Neither of us is left wholly happy at the part he has played in history, and all of us are troubled at heart.

It is the fashion of the hour to say that what we have been witnessing in the history of our time is the judgment of God upon our sins. One seems to sense in the Psalms as they progress a grappling with the problem of misfortune, whether personal or national, and the gradual emergence of a sense of guilt. The initial suggestion is that other men, wicked men, have done this to me; then there is the more sobering reflection that God may have done this to me; finally there is the conclusion, "No, I have done this to myself." Such, certainly, is the account of Israel's misfortunes, given in the writings of the Hebrew prophets. It is a stern doctrine, but stands the test of time. This conclusion, rather than any facile promises of a Messianic age, is, perhaps, the heart of the moral teaching of those ancient seers

Only resolute and mature natures can accept it. It is, for example, this very quality in Lincoln's account of the causes and consequences of the Civil War, in his Second Inaugural Address, which in Lord Charnwood's measured words "does invite a comment, and a comment which should be quite explicit. Probably no other speech of a modern statesman uses so unreservedly the language of intense religious feeling." In these latest years the want of this penitential note in the public pronouncements of our leaders has marked their departure from the ancient salutary conviction of past generations that if we are to walk with God, we must walk humbly. The appeal, whether political or military, has been to self-reliance and even to self-righteousness. To this extent our modern states have been becoming progressively unchristian; they can no longer run the risk of confessing national sins.

If, however, we are to hope for anything like world peace, it is clear that many of the tempers which have prevailed in the nationalism of the Western world must be modified. The traditions of absolute sovereignty, of imperialism, and of isolationism no longer serve the needs of "One World" in a new day. The stronger states must be prepared to change many of their principles and practices. If we are to have peace, the doctrine of state sovereignty must be accommodated to new facts. It is to be hoped that secular statesmen realize this fact so fully that their procedure will be determined accordingly. Even enlightened self-interest should

prompt all concerned to move with the times into what we hope may be a better future.

But enlightened self-interest still falls short of those more sensitive promptings which religion has always encouraged. Therefore, if the state cannot, or does not, officially sound the note of humble penitence, it is the more incumbent upon religion to do so. An English essayist of the last generation has described a scene at the end of the life of one of the great scientists of the nineteenth century:

> It is the strenuous life devoted to high ends. There is a very pleasant picture of the Sunday evenings in St. John's Wood in the latter years. In summer the family are gathered in the garden. Friends drop in, there is talk of the latest scientific results, of progress, and the smiting of the enemy. It is the afternoon of the successful man, golden, but with a touch of evening and the approaching night. There is that in plenty which should accompany old age: honour, love, obedience, troops of friends. Only in the end something appears lacking. Perhaps the outlook entirely narrowed to a fragment of time and the success of a lifetime stands judged by a sense of larger issues beyond. It is Sunday evening. Outside the walled garden is a chaos of confusion and pain. And as the twilight falls there comes the sound of a world-old appeal renewed ever in humility and patience: "Pitifully behold the sorrows of our hearts. Mercifully forgive the sins of Thy people."[1]

If we forget that world-old appeal, or fail to renew it in humility and patience, we shall have left unheard and unsaid the one thing which, perhaps, above all

[1] C. F. G. Masterman, *In Peril of Change* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1905), p. 220.

others contemporary religion requires us to hear and say.

There are not wanting among us countless churchmen who are saying, "The trouble with the world is that 'All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way' (*Is. 53:6*). We have sinned and we are sinners." The danger is that these words shall become so familiar that in the common mind they may soon lose their vital truthfulness, and lapse to the level of a lifeless platitude. In theory we all agree to the proposition that our sinfulness has brought upon us the calamities of our day. But individually we find it hard to isolate our private share in the total corporate guilt, and even harder to see how as Christian citizens we are to set about those tasks of self-reformation which all honest acts of penitence require.

It has been said that the main objection to the theater is not moral but emotional. The theater arouses our emotions, sometimes for better and sometimes for worse, but when the play is over we go out into the night onto a rainy pavement where there is no opportunity for us to express the feelings which have been deeply stirred. The perpetual frustration of our feelings attendant upon constant play-going slowly undermines the integrity of our emotional life and we are eventually mired in the slough of sentimentality.

The same may be said of the emotions roused by religion, particularly the feeling of moral regret. As with the indulgence of sorrow, so with the indulgence

of our moods of penitence, as they become conventional, they may also become insincere and ineffectual. After his first wife died Leslie Stephen said in a letter to Charles Eliot Norton, "The problem of making sorrow ennobling instead of deteriorating is a terribly hard one." Of all the forms of waste in which man indulges he apparently thought the waste of sorrow the most tragic. He gave his answer to his self-imposed problem in his famous essay on "Wordsworth's Ethics." That essay, as his biographer Maitland says, is "Stephen's lay sermon on the unselfish use of sorrow, preached at the preacher's self."

Our time is faced with a similar problem, how to make the vast corporate sorrow of this time ennobling rather than deteriorating. Each of us must preach to himself his own lay sermon on the unselfish use of all the pain and sadness of these years, which he has felt in his own members, or in which he has shared as a citizen of the world. The danger is that with the passing of the military emergency we shall lapse into the mood of the theater-goer who has witnessed a classic tragedy, and gets from it thereafter only that debilitating pleasure of a reminiscent sadness. It will be very easy to become sentimental about World War II.

If our emotional life is confronted with this peril, our moral life is doubly imperiled. To confess that we are sinners, and yet to go on living hereafter just as we have lived before, not altering the manner of our life a whit save as the state compels us to modify it, will mean an impairment of our integrity and an

indictment of our sincerity. The Wisdom literature of Israel warns us that it is better never to make a vow at all than to vow and then not keep the vow. The same might be said of our confession of sin. It is better not to repent at all than to repent and then not do works meet for repentance thereafter. Frederick W. Robertson once said—and his words are bold—"Bad as the results have been in the world of making light of sin, those of brooding over it too much have been worse."

The now fashionable vernacular about the sinfulness of our time should be used, therefore, "discreetly, advisedly, soberly." If we take such words upon our lips, we should do so with a clear understanding of all that the assertion implies, and with a sober determination to lead thereafter a "godly, righteous and sober life."

So far as individual responsibility for the corporate sins of Christendom is concerned, candor compels us to admit that the average citizen—let us say in England or America—is not an aggressively vicious person. It has recently been said of him, "His chief weakness is weakness of the head rather than the heart. He is sympathetic and full of good aspirations; he is mild and kind; and he hates war." Left to himself he would not invade other countries, or bomb cities. "He is not anti-Christian, he knows that he has grown up within a Christian tradition. He claims to be a shareholder in the Christian corporation, but the stock has been watered almost to the vanishing point and is held,

moreover, by absentee owners."[2] He is a single voter, and his vote counts only one among the millions of ballots cast at the polls. It is true that the sum of all such persons as himself chooses a legislature and a Congress, elects a governor and a President. Therefore he tries to do his faithful duty in a democracy, yet he is not to be blamed if he at times is unable to feel that the whole burden of making the policy of a nation rests upon his shoulders alone. This is not escapism or indifferentism; it is a realistic measure of his own influence upon the course of human affairs and a defense against an exaggerated sense of self-importance. He is not the less sorrowful on this account, nor less troubled in conscience. Nor is he trying to shelve his moral responsibility by making society as a whole a scapegoat in his behalf. What he is trying to do is to define his sense of guilt in terms which will make possible specific acts that still give reality to his profession of penitence.

If one consults one's own self-consciousness as a Christian over all these recent years—let us say from World War I to the beginning of World War II—one is more aware of things left undone than of things done. It is the memory of our sins of omission, rather than of commission, that lies heaviest on our conscience. These sins are none the less grave because they are less dramatic than those of the more satanic transgressors of our time. For example, we are all aware, in ret-

[2] D. Elton Trueblood, *The Predicament of Modern Man* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1944).

rospect, of a lack of intelligent and sympathetic concern for peoples whose lot was hard and was going from bad to worse. We are aware that we were too self-centered, too much concerned with our minor domestic troubles to go beyond the borders of our own life to an understanding of the lives of others—foreign nations, aliens, possible enemies. We took our customary gifts to our altars, but did not withhold these gifts until we had been reconciled to some possibly alienated brother. These sins of omission were due to a lack of interest in the lives of others, and that lack of interest was in turn due to a lack of knowledge. What we left undone was left undone in the first instance because of that unforgivable trait which Dr. Johnson once described as "Ignorance, sheer ignorance."

Even when we had some information which should have disquieted us, we continued to leave undone what we ought to have done, from a lack of imagination. Imagination is the necessary premise to human sympathy and compassion. It is the most mature form of unselfishness, in that it is unselfishness in terms of the mind rather than of the purse. It is the ability to enter into the lives of others and share their experience with them. An English essayist once said, "The broken link between classes in the modern world is a fundamental defect of the imagination." That has been and still is the broken link between nations and races. Until that link is restored we shall have no enduring peace.

It is in some such terms as these that the average

civilian church-going Christian in lands like our own is aware of his guilt and sees the need of amendment of his life.

If the churches of Christendom were to begin soberly to instruct and discipline their members in these specific ways, they could leaven mightily the lump of statecraft in the modern world. Their actual numbers—to say nothing of their nominal numbers—are such that if they act in concert they hold what may well be the balance of power in our world. The single isolated Christian can probably do rather little to determine the course of world affairs; but all Christians together could do very much.

Once again, then, "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (*Rom. 3:23*). To that indictment our generation must bow, and there is no evasion of our corporate guilt. But unless our feeling of guilt is to degenerate into the luxury of reminiscent sentimentality we must "repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance" (*Acts 26:20*). These works must be capable of concrete definition; they must be intelligently planned and steadily sustained. Otherwise our present penitential moods will evaporate as the morning dew and we shall lapse back into our indifference and isolationism. Such works suggest themselves to us as we truly repent of our past and make purposes for our future.

In particular our sincerity and sympathy should lead us on to a Christian "ministry of reconciliation." That ministry concerns not only the reconciliation of man

to God; it concerns also the reconciliation of alienated men to one another.

One need not be charged with high-church ecclesiasticism if one soberly thinks that the shattered fabric of society within the framework of historic "Christendom" must look to the Christian churches for much of the work of reconciliation and reconstruction which has now to be done.

These words are being written just as the San Francisco Conference is drawing to its close. That Conference will not have achieved, even in a blueprint, the theoretical Utopia. Of that Conference a realistic commentator says, "The tough material which the delegates were trying to shape into a world organization had been baked hard in history's furnace. Most of the real obstacles were as obvious, as untechnical, as familiar—and as unnoticed—as household furniture. There was the sovereign state. Every delegate represented one, and, as a public official, was sworn to uphold its sovereignty. The old notion of sovereignty was stronger than ever." That notion will not have vanished between the time that the Conference has ended and these words are printed. For, truly, it has been "baked hard in history's furnace."

Christians may never renounce altogether the classical doctrine of the sovereignty of God. But in so far as they allow their religion to become a pious stamp of approval put upon one or another of the temporal sovereignties of this world—and this is one of the spiritual perils of our time—they have parted with one

of the major ideas of their heritage. The whole idea of exercising human lordship over other human beings is alien to the Gospel (*Mark 10: 35-45*). The vocation of the Christian is of another sort.

We shall never achieve an internationalism which merits the name of Christian until the idea of sovereignty is supplanted by that of humble service. But the prospect of any such conception of political nationalism is still remote. Meanwhile the churches of Christendom need not wait for that far-off conversion. The ties between Christians in our war-torn world are probably stronger at the moment than the ties between any other societies or institutions; stronger than the ties between states, stronger than the ties between universities, stronger than the ties between banks and industries and cartels. But, whether they be stronger or weaker, there is throughout the churches of our Western world a deep desire and steady determination to re-establish broken relationships and reaffirm common concerns. Pastor Niemoeller, on his release from his long imprisonment, said that it is to the churches of Germany, Protestant and Catholic alike and together, that his people must look for the restoration of national life. We hope that he speaks for us all.

Robert Browne, the father of Congregationalism, launched his movement with a historic work entitled *A Treatise of Reformation without Tarying for Anie*, in which, as one of his biographers says, "he asserts the inalienable right of the church to effect necessary reforms without the authorization or permission of the

civil authority." We who are in any way his spiritual heirs and successors shall do well to catch something of the sense of urgency which he felt. The affairs of statecraft may have to move with prudent deliberation. But Christians the world over need not tarry for any in their efforts to give substance to their faith in One Holy Church Universal.

The cause of Christian unity has made great strides in the last quarter of a century. The scaffolding was already erected, before the Second World War, for a World Council of Churches. The offices in Geneva of that Council ("in process of formation") have been one of the most effective means of communication between peoples divided by war. Now, with the end of the fighting in Europe, that work may go forward. The Christians of continental Europe need help, generous to the point of sacrifice on our part, for the rehabilitation of their religious life.

If the churches of America and of England fail to add works to their faith in Christian unity at this time, one of the greatest opportunities ever offered to the Christian religion over all the centuries will have been missed. We shall have our own difficult domestic problems in these lands of ours, which have come through the struggle unoccupied and come out of it victorious. But it will be an unutterable tragedy if these years pass and their great opportunity be gone because "thy servant was busy here and there" with his own immediate concerns.

We believe we have saved the historic framework

within which the practice of the Christian religion is not only permissible but progressively possible. We cannot afford to let the military vindication of that framework suffice, neglecting hereafter the redrafting of a better design within the framework. It will be by generous acts of human help, as in the earliest days of our religion, that the true fabric of Christendom may be restored, and these acts may be done and must be done "without tarying for anie."

Only by such acts can we vindicate the sincerity of our professions of repentance and of our Christian compassion. Only in such ways can we save the reflections of another returning Lenten season from degenerating into sentimentalism. Without the "works" of sympathy and sacrifice for which the times call, addressed to the dire need of fellow Christians in other lands, our "faith" in all that for which Lent stands is dead.

Years ago Tolstoi said, "The most important thing in life is for man to unite with man, and the worst thing in life is for men to go apart from one another." The worst that could possibly befall humanity has happened in our time, "good measure, pressed down and running over." We must begin to try to substitute the best that can happen to us for the worst that has happened to us. To revert to the recurring word which has run through these pages, we must find "ways" for man to unite with man. Our charter for so doing is found in the ancient and inviolate faith of our religion that all we are brethren because One is our Father.

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